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**The spiritual dimension in the personal and professional
lives of primary headteachers**

Stephen Howarth

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**School of Education and Professional Development
University of Huddersfield**

June 2011

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Abstract

The research study investigates the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers. The term 'spiritual' is interpreted widely to include its religious and nonreligious forms and to leave open the possibility of a variety of readings.

The two research questions that give focus to the study are:

1. What is the nature of the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers?
2. Is there a discernible connection between such a spiritual dimension and headteachers' work in primary schools?

Data were gathered through biographically-focussed case studies of six primary phase headteachers leading faith and community schools in England. Data-gathering procedures included biographical interviews, observations and scrutiny of documentation.

The research study identifies three descriptive characteristics of the spiritual dimension:

1. that it is refracted through a range of relationships, which for some headteachers may include a relationship with the divine;
2. that it is given expression through headteachers' dispositions and attitudes, perhaps informed by a consciousness of the divine or deep sense of human interconnectedness; and
3. that these dispositions and attitudes are fluid and layered, holding within them the potential for the profundity and intensification that distinguishes the term from the moral, personal or social aspects of primary headteachers' lives, though they are related.

The spiritual dimension, in this context, is associated with personal being and becoming, rather than the exercise of professional skills and know-how. What may be seen as spiritual activities, such as prayer or deep reflection on questions of purpose and meaning in life, seem to bring not just resilience or resolve to primary headteachers, but also affirmation of their work, particularly their care for their schools' communities.

The research study's findings add to the growing understanding of the spiritual dimension of school leadership and offer a biographical contextualisation that has had more limited attention in studies of spirituality and headship. They appear to normalise the place of the spiritual in heads' professional work and therefore to legitimise the language of the spirit in the discourse of school leadership.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the research study

1.1 Background

The research study has its genesis in my own career experiences as a headteacher of two Catholic primary schools, a university-based school management course provider, an Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) inspector of primary schools and National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) assessor and tutor working with aspirant primary headteachers. From April, 2009 it became mandatory to hold the NPQH in order to apply for a first headship in the maintained sector (DfES, 2004a).

The study's focus on primary phase headship has its origins in these activities and experiences. Reflecting on them over the years raised many questions relating to: the sources of my own sustenance, motivation and inspiration, particularly in difficult times in schools; my response to emotionally intense episodes, such as the serious illness of a young pupil; the relationship between personal faith and professional life and the comparative neglect of such issues in the school leadership and management programmes that I encountered, first as a serving headteacher and later as provider, assessor and tutor. In short, my attention turned towards the people who are headteachers and away from the practice of headship. Inevitably, this led me to consider matters of being and becoming, as well as doing, in heads' professional work and so to what some may call the spiritual dimension in the lives of school leaders.

Developing the proposal for this thesis and then engaging with the processes of doctoral research provided the opportunity to locate these concerns in a theoretical framework and to explore them in depth. Though its gestation stretches over four decades, the research study remains timely, given the high personal demands of the job that lie behind current difficulties in recruiting headteachers to all types of schools (Hill, 2005) and a growing concern to understand school leaders and their work more holistically, for example, through studies of the relationship between leadership and change 'through the dual lens of emotions and relationships' (Harris, 2004, p.393) or the impact of their emotions on primary headteachers' work (Crawford, 2004).

1.2 Spirituality and headship: a reawakening

Grace (2000) comments that contemporary headteachers are the inheritors of a school leadership culture that 'for over a hundred years gave priority to spiritual, moral and

pedagogical leadership in education' (p.241). Perhaps, then, interest in the spiritual dimension of contemporary headship is not an entirely new phenomenon; it could represent a reawakening of longstanding expectations of school leaders that appear to have been marginalised in recent decades. One impetus for this interest may lie in those educational reforms stemming from the 1988 Education Reform Act that require headteachers to act as spiritual leaders in their schools, in so far as they have an obligation to promote the spiritual development of their pupils. The headteacher's legal responsibility for spiritual education, for providing opportunities for pupils' spiritual development in school, seems to require both personal engagement in the spiritual quest and 'possession of appropriate levels of spiritual literacy' (Wright, 2000, p.138). More significantly, such interest could represent an adverse reaction to the dominant hegemony of headteacher development of the last decade or so that seems to have privileged practical skills and competence and neglected the 'holistic view of the person' (West-Burnham, 1997, p.239). In this sense, it represents a search for completeness; a realisation that any understanding of contemporary school headship is impoverished and partial unless its spiritual dimension is recognised and included.

There is, then, a growing belief that school management and leadership activities cannot be considered in isolation from spiritual, ethical and emotional issues; that good management and leadership are as much matters of 'character as well as skill' (Chater, 2002, p.118). A themed issue of the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, devoted to 'Spirituality and School Management/Leadership' was published in August, 2002, reflecting these ideas. Sergiovanni (2001) takes the spiritual life to the heart of headship. He argues that school leaders must go beyond sources that are 'secular' (p.18) and tap the human spirit:

But the unique human response is one of spirit, and our spirit responds to values, meaningful ideas, beliefs, moral dimensions and standards. The character of leadership builds as the spirit is tapped. How credible is the leader? Is the leader honest, forthright and sincere? Does the leader model beliefs, live purposes, exemplify standards? In essence, what does the leader represent, and does this representation symbolize something of value to followers? (p.18)

He suggests that headship is about developing 'moral connections' (Sergiovanni, 2001, p.34) between the members of the school's community, articulating and modelling what is worth following, purposes, values and beliefs; that is, those things to which the human spirit responds. So the source of a headteacher's authority lies not just in position or expertise, but also in spiritual capacity.

As long ago as 1987, Coulson commented critically on management development provision for headteachers and its prioritisation of performance, 'largely unconnected with the head as a person' (Coulson, 1987, p.21). He contrasted this with the Swedish Leader Education Programme of the time with its 'powerful stress on self-knowledge – personal, professional and institutional' (p.23). Later, Southworth (1995) warned of the emergence of approaches to

headteachers' development 'driven by a bureaucratic rationale which values only effectiveness and technical training' (p.213). More recently, Orchard (2002) has argued that contemporary preparation for headship, such as that provided through the NPQH:

...needs to move beyond technical competencies, however important, to include attributes of character that translate 'know-how' into a practice of integrity. (p.168)

Similarly, Bottery (2004) notes that contemporary frameworks for thinking about school leadership are concerned with training, practical issues and enhancement of skills, and offer little to suggest that school leaders need a moral compass, developed sense of meaning or capacity for ethical dialogue; that is, little about the 'developing *education* of the leader' (p.204; author's italics). He remains critical of what he sees as the recent infusion of moral purpose in national school leadership development programmes provided through the National College for School Leadership (NCSL), arguing that its interpretation of such purpose seems limited to a mission to close the gap between higher and lower achievers in schools so that more pupils can reach 'standards set elsewhere' and not to include those serious issues relating to the 'good society', the 'good life' or 'different ways of achieving this' (p.205), which raise profound questions of meaning and direction in life.

It would be misleading to suggest the existence of a widespread desire to supplant models of headship based on technical knowledge and key skills; rather, such critiques are seeking to complement them by stressing the significance of qualities of the human spirit such as intuition, hope and personal insight in a much fuller, richer account of school leadership. Consequently, West-Burnham (2002a) suggests that it is no longer possible to think about an effective school leader in any meaningful sense without simultaneously considering what it means to be an effective person and that, for him, spirituality is a 'defining component' of such a person. It is in 'the essence of what it means to be a person that the foundations of leadership are to be found' (p.1). Of course, it could be argued that the spiritual aspects of headship have been marginalised because they are considered to be individual matters, simply too elusive and contested to include in contemporary models of headship or in any depth in headteachers' development programmes and perhaps confused with the search for a personal faith position (West-Burnham, 1997).

Seemingly, spirituality has gained more currency outside educational leadership, albeit contested and problematic, for example in the management of business and commercial organisations, particularly in the United States. The international *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion*, mainly focussed on these settings, appeared in 2004. However, Chater (2002) suggests that this emerging managerial interest in meaning, belonging, identity, purpose and happiness in the workplace is 'merely the latest gimmick in support of the bottom line: a spiritually aware workforce is a more productive workforce' (p.121). Ashmos and Duchon (2000) similarly attribute corporate America's interest in spirituality to the need to

improve morale amongst a workforce disillusioned by decades of restructuring and reorganisation and increasing global competition. In their view this led to an acknowledgment that employees need to find meaning in their work if their creative potential is to be fully realised; that 'nourishing the soul may be good for business' (p.136). Of course, others might argue that any interest in spirituality in the workplace is to be welcomed, even if its roots do lie in a search for increased productivity and greater managerial effectiveness. Other studies have investigated a potential relationship between what may be called business leaders' spirituality and their work. For example, Delbecq (1999) reported the perceptions of business leaders of the ways in which their active Christian commitment informed their business activities. Interestingly, they appeared to see their spiritual life as integral to their work; their business leadership as a calling rather than a job or career and their role as a form of service, reflecting the comments of Hartnett and Kline (2005) given in Chapter 2 and those of Margaret, one of the primary headteachers who participated in this study, who was a committed Christian.

Writing on what may be called the management of the spiritual in schools and headteachers' work in providing opportunities for pupils' spiritual development in school is more extensive than that on the spiritual promptings in heads' lives and work. Helpful studies have been undertaken, for example, of headteachers' understandings of spirituality itself (Davies, 2001) and the relationship between heads' faith traditions and the processes of spiritual and moral development in faith schools (Johnson, 2002). However, there are fewer empirical studies such as that by Woods (2007) of headteachers' own spiritual experiences and their implications for school leadership. So, whatever the case, in spite of renewed interest, the relationship of spirituality to headship appears to remain unclear, subject to a variety of interpretations and in need of further study and investigation (Chater, 2002). Certainly, the language of the spirit has yet to find legitimacy in school leadership theory (Woods, 2007).

Spirituality does not appear to be high on any current official agenda. An internet search (20 April, 2011) provided little evidence of any renewed or current interest in spirituality. The Department for Education (DfE) referenced spirituality mainly in relation to existing statutory requirements, for example in its guidance on home school agreements or religious education and OfSTED through its guidance on 'Promoting and evaluating pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' published in 2004. The most recent interpretation of the term in its association with school leadership posted by the National College for Leadership and Children's Services (formerly NCSL) appeared to be to West-Burnham's (2009) article on 'Innervision' and heads' effectiveness.

1.3 The research study

Therefore, this research study is intended to add to current conceptualisations of school leadership. In particular, it aims to contribute to a more holistic understanding of primary school headship that readily acknowledges each headteacher's complexity, including what may be called spiritual promptings that inform their lives and their work.

The research questions which give focus to the study are:

1. What is the nature of the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers?
2. Is there a discernible connection between such a spiritual dimension and headteachers' work in primary schools?

Throughout, the research study admits the contested and problematic possibility of a 'rich and sometimes contradictory diversity of *spiritualities*' (King, 1998, p.96; author's italics). It is accepted that spirituality may be found inside faith communities or outside religious traditions altogether. This openness is intended to allow the study to capture more comprehensively the range of promptings and responses to them that may be regarded as spiritual found amongst its participating primary headteachers.

Inevitably, however, the contexts and backgrounds of the heads nuanced the term and its use in the study. Therefore, any discussion of the concept and its possible connection with a religious tradition relates mainly to Christianity, the major provider of faith-based primary schools, the major faith tradition represented in the agreed syllabuses that define religious education in community primary schools and the faith tradition most familiar to the primary headteacher participants in the research study. This is not to say, of course, that other religious traditions do not have rich spiritualities. For example, in Islam spirituality has its source in the Qur'an. So spirituality itself may be seen as synonymous with belief in and submission to the word of God and the 'Five Pillars', the historic observances of Islam, as a form of spiritual renewal and purification (Nasr, 1997). Jewish spirituality seems to reside in studying Torah and in responding to God's will as well as recognising God's presence in the ordinariness and splendours of creation (Kushner, 2001). These interpretations of the term have different emphases from the broad concept of spirituality explored in Chapter 2 and used in the research study.

Any references to prayer that the heads elected to disclose are used to illuminate their leadership narratives and a spiritual dimension in their work rather than to investigate their

religious beliefs or experiences. The research study is concerned with those heads' perceptions of the effects of praying on their working lives and not the efficacy of their prayer, such as intercessions for those who are ill (BBC, 2003; Butler et al., 2003).

School leadership is deliberately associated with headship, though it is understood that leadership is not the prerogative of one individual and is perhaps more appropriately conceptualised as an organisational quality distributed amongst the members of the school's community (Crow, 2005). Nevertheless, the headteacher remains the crucial, central figure in leading the school's community and the terminology used in the research study is intended to reflect this. Headship is understood to include both leadership and management. The debate concerning the usefulness and nature of any distinction between the two concepts is ongoing (Bush and Glover, 2003) but outside the scope of the research study. School leadership, as the term is used in the study, is intended to subsume management activities within it.

1.4 The structure of the research study

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the study, its rationale and aims. Chapter 2 provides review of the literature relating to the aims of the study and is offered in three broad sections:

- an exploration of the elusive and complex nature of the concept of spirituality itself;

- an exploration of what is already known about those factors that bring energy, meaning and challenge to school leaders' and their work; and

- an overview of indicative writing on spirituality and school leadership.

It concludes with a summary of the key conceptual issues arising from the review, intended to provide the theoretical framework that allowed the research to progress.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology and data-gathering procedures employed in the study. The ambiguities and difficulties surrounding spirituality posed a number of methodological problems, though, somewhat paradoxically, these complexities strengthened the research design, offering different ways to investigate spirituality in its association with primary school leadership. Six headteachers, from a range of maintained primary schools, including four faith and two community schools participated in the final project. Their faith positions varied, adding to the richness of the images of the spiritual promptings informing their work that they provided.

A biographical case study approach was adopted, each head being a particular case. The biographical focus was important, reflecting the holism that discerning the spiritual in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers required (Priestley, 2005). Data were gathered through a series of interviews, observations of the headteachers in their day-to-day work and scrutiny of supplementary documentation. The study raised difficult ethical matters and made significant emotional demands on me as a researcher. These are discussed in detail and contextualised in the account of the research process provided.

Chapter 4 is the first of the findings chapters, presenting the research data from interviews, observations and documentation in the form of six 'stories'. Data are given in this way so that each head's story and the processes that formed it may be understood holistically and in total; an important condition for understanding their spiritual promptings and their responses to them. The stories are central to the study, illuminating what some may call spiritual capacities and characteristics in heads' lives and work, such as compassion or integrity.

Chapter 5 analyses the findings in the form of five themes, drawn from the stories. Though each story is complex, sufficient broad commonalities emerged from the data to permit the themes to be constructed. They are intended to capture particular spiritual promptings, including beliefs and values, and the nature of any spirituality discernible in the head's lives and work. The themes are:

1. professional beliefs and values;
2. relationships;
3. an implicit spirituality;
4. a spirituality that is more explicit;
5. a religiously-based spirituality.

The themes are not discrete and boundaries between them are sometimes blurred, reflecting the ambiguity and fluidity of any spiritual dimension that may be revealed.

Chapter 6 interprets the findings given in Chapters 4 and 5. It is argued that the nature of the promptings at work in heads' lives in and out of school revealed through the findings and their responses to them make the application of the term 'spiritual dimension' justified and intelligible. It is suggested that the spiritual dimension exists in a complex interplay of emotions, relationships and what may be called spiritual promptings, is dispositional but episodically intense and has a significant influence on the practice of primary headship.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings of the research study, in particular the responses to the research questions given above. Key descriptive characteristics of the spiritual dimension and their expression through primary headship are identified. In this way, the research findings

add to the growing understanding of the spiritual dimension of primary school leadership. In addition, the research study offers a biographical contextualisation that has had more limited attention in previous studies of spirituality and headship.

Implications for headteachers and researchers arising from the research study are provided. It is argued that what has been identified as spiritual activity, for example engagement with profound existential questions, is normal and appropriate in the lives of primary headteachers and therefore that the language of the spirit has a legitimate place in the discourse of school leadership.

Chapter 2

A review of the literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a critical review of theoretical and empirical studies of school leadership and spirituality relevant to the research study. The review is presented in three broad sections, though, reflecting the elusive nature of spirituality and of leadership, delineations between them are sometimes blurred. The three sections provide:

an exploration of the concept of spirituality itself. The concept is elusive and complex and any interpretation of the research findings is likely to be shaped by how spirituality is understood. Therefore it is important that the meanings and applications of the term as it is used in the study are explored and nuanced (Section 2.2);

an exploration of what is already known about those factors that bring energy, meaning and challenge to school leaders and their work and the extent to which any spiritual promptings are already recognised and included in such writing (Section 2.3); and

an overview of indicative writing on spirituality and school leadership, illustrative of its conceptual problems and the limitations of the extent to which insights from the spiritual life contribute to mainstream writing on headship (Section 2.4).

Given the slippery nature of the concept, writing on spirituality is included that is not directly concerned with school leaders and their work, but offers glimpses of the spiritual in the lives of those who work in non-educational settings and so provides additional, but more oblique clues to the nature and extent of these promptings. In this way, the chapter prepares the necessary conceptual ground to enable the research study to progress and the aims given in Chapter 3 to be met.

This study is intended to investigate, in particular, how those human capacities and capabilities that may be identified as spiritual, such as compassion or love, help individual headteachers to make sense of and give meaning to their practices in relation to the school contexts in which they work. Therefore, it does not include an extensive or detailed examination of writing on what may be seen as the management of the spiritual in schools, for example the role of school leaders in promoting spirituality (Brennan, 1997), systemic tensions in the promotion of spiritual development in faith schools (Ota, 2001), headteachers' understandings of spiritual development (Davies, 2001) or OfSTED's inspection of provision

for spiritual development (OfSTED, 2004). Neither does it address in depth those cultural and leadership issues arising from studies of headteachers' perceptions of spirituality and spiritual development undertaken in faith schools (Johnson and Castelli, 2000; Johnson et al., 2000; Johnson, 2002).

2.2 Spirituality

This section examines the ambiguous and contested nature of the concept itself.

2.2.1 Problems of language, definition and usage

Defining spirituality is highly problematic. Contemporary readings of the term are confusing and ambiguities surround its use in educational settings (Eaude, 2002). King (1998) comments that spirituality 'defies exhaustive description and unequivocal definition' (p.94), Halstead (1997) that spirituality means 'different, even contradictory, things to different people' (p.98) and Yob (2003) that spirituality is 'the kind of term that is handed around in different contexts and takes on many different meanings' (p.112). Priestley (2005) doubts that anything is to be gained by 'any attempted definition' (p.210), arguing that the 'conceptual control' needed to progress any discussion of the term may be best obtained by 'a cluster of descriptions' (p.211). Given its mysterious nature, it seems that spirituality is unlikely to be understood through 'literal or prosaic claims' (Yob, 2003, p.123) or pinned down by definition. Its richness seems to be captured more appropriately in images that in turn resonate with, complete and correct other images, though such 'images for comprehending spirituality, even in long established traditions of faith, are not static, but organic' (Yob, 2003, p.123).

Halstead (2003) notes that these images, often embedded in metaphor, permeate writing about spirituality. Such metaphors stand at the 'fusion of imagination and embodied experience' (p.85). It is as if they offer the only way of getting to grips with spiritual realities, otherwise 'spiritual concepts may be beyond our grasp' (p.87). Indeed, Halstead (2005) goes on to argue that it is a reliance on metaphor that distinguishes spiritual discourse from other sorts of language; it is the 'method by which meaning in the spiritual domain is constructed' (p.138). However, there are difficulties associated with using metaphor in the language of spirituality, particularly those posed by what seems to be a search for a literal equivalence and by the apparent necessity to explain one spiritual metaphor by using another.

The metaphors proposed by West-Burnham (2002a) to express the spiritual and its place in the lives of school leaders in his discussion paper *Spirituality and Leadership* illustrate these difficulties perfectly. West-Burnham (2002a) describes spirituality initially as 'a journey' (p.2 and p.3) then more directly as a 'reservoir of hope' (p.2) and finally, as 'the search' (p.3). In

other words, he seems compelled to use one metaphor in an attempt to make another more meaningful. Halstead (2005) maintains that though spiritual language has 'a powerful reliance on metaphor' (p.137), in the context of spiritual discourse, 'metaphor does not point ultimately to a literal statement' (p.138). Rather, it points to another metaphor, seemingly creating an enclosed 'world of inescapable metaphor' (p.138). Spiritual metaphor, then, appears to be peculiarly irreducible to literal expression. If this is so, the question arises of how an attempt to attempt to capture spirituality through metaphor may be said to have any meaning at all. Halstead (2005) also contends that some metaphors may carry richer connotations and potential for imaginative insight than others. It could be argued, for example, that the 'reservoir of hope' carries connotations of an individualised, private spirituality and so that the metaphor limits, rather than promotes conceptual investigation. Much depends on the nature of metaphor itself and the faith and experiential position of those engaging with it. As Halstead (2005) argues, a metaphor may seek to express experience or it may be more concerned with imaginative suggestion. So the metaphor 'God is Love' may express the experience of divine succour or comfort for believers, but suggest a non-literal, imaginative way of looking at life for non-believers.

However, the apparent irreducibility of spiritual metaphors does not necessarily signify meaninglessness. A way forward may be to get away from issues of literal equivalence as sources of meaning and see spiritual metaphors as 'attempts to explore the profoundest questions about life, death and the human condition' (Halstead, 2005, p.147). In this sense, 'spirituality has much in common with aesthetics'. Perhaps metaphors exist in spiritual discourse only to provoke further deep questions of meaning. West-Burnham (2002a) may be attempting to capture too much meaning and definition through his proposed metaphor and its subsequent exposition, so narrowing its interpretation and its openness to different, possibly conflicting meanings. Perhaps it is more important to recognise that implicit in 'reservoir of hope' are heads' attitudes and dispositions, opening up ideas to do with the self-knowledge, reflection and sustenance prompted through the pursuit of their educational purposes. It is those things rather than literal expression or the status and usefulness of 'reservoir of hope' as an attempted definition of spirituality and its association with school leadership that can give the metaphor its meaning.

It could be said that we know spirituality when we meet it, even though our attempts to pin down the term through metaphor and analytical discourse are unsatisfactory. Perhaps that is because human spirituality is communicated, at least in part, nonverbally (Berryman, 2001). Attention to connotations, inferences, laughter or silence provides important clues to spirituality. As Berryman (2001) notes, identical words said with a 'smile, a sneer, a wink, or a tear' (p.16) can mean different things. In Christian theology, of course, the criterion of

spirituality is precisely 'demeanour and conduct' (McGhee, 2003, p.30): the way in which things are done reveals the person. McGhee (2003) continues:

...we may measure a person's spirituality by the vitality of their sympathetic awareness of others, and their discernment of the nature of their needs. (p.30)

In other words, the manner in which life is lived, or headship conducted, and others are treated expresses the spiritual in ways that definition, however comprehensive, may not. So, for example, Priestley (2000) argues that the spiritual dimension in human life is characterised by a form of thinking that, amongst other things, acknowledges human worth and refuses to reduce people to abstractions to be 'dealt with systematically' (p.97). These arguments, in turn, suggest that clues to any spiritual dimension may be sought in the demeanours and attitudes with which headteachers approach their day-to-day work, such as their seemingly mundane dealings with their schools' communities.

Johnson (2005) argues, in fact, that humour and laughter are related to the concepts of connectedness and relatedness, invoking echoes of the 'relational consciousness' that Hay (2001, p.108) regards as a fundamental feature of a developing spirituality. She contends that laughter can support the personal and spiritual development of pupils and teachers in school because it creates the positive conditions necessary for successful learning and risk-taking. For this reason, humour indicates that 'an educational process is underway' and laughter can be the means by which the individual 'gains wisdom and power over their own lives' (p.92). Johnson (2005) goes on to suggest that laughter has an important role in helping humans to interrogate their world. After all, laughter is rooted in incongruity; in seeing the world in unexpected and different ways. She cites Berger (1997) and contends that the comic creates a world that is very different from the ordinary; one where human limitations can be overcome. So, in this way, humour holds out '*a promise of redemption*' (Berger, 1997, p.x; author's italics). Thus laughter can be 'spiritual and redemptive' (Johnson, 2005, p.91). Humour seems to offer a site for the puzzlement and wonder that can provide insights into the human condition creating momentous changes to established world views. Of course, laughter can also be spiteful, divisive and inauthentic and so, as Johnson (2005) warns: 'its tone and purpose must be tested out' (p.91).

Emmons (2000) contends that people are intentional beings, engaged in efforts 'to strive toward personal meaningfully defined goals' (p.5). He argues that 'spirituality is the expression of ultimate concern' and that such concern may be discerned through 'personal goal strivings' (p.4). He suggests that in traditional devotional writing, 'spiritual growth and spiritual maturity are viewed as processes of goal attainment, the ultimate goal being intimacy with the divine' (p.4). In this way, the work that heads undertake (as well as the manner in which it is conducted) and the vision for their school's development that they construct may be seen to be rather more than managerial tasks, but instead to represent deeply held personal truths, involving that which is of ultimate, and so, spiritual concern, to them.

2.2.2 Separating religion and spirituality

One way of seeking further clarity may be to tease spirituality from its traditional religious associations. The advantage of separating religion and spirituality for this research study, at least conceptually, is that such a separation allows the possibility of discussing the spiritual dimension in the life of a headteacher who does not profess a religious belief.

The usage of 'spirituality' has changed markedly over time. As Halstead (1997) notes, for many centuries, it 'was used almost exclusively in the context either of religion generally or of the more sacred and devotional aspects of religion' (p.98). Now, spirituality is used more generically and not assumed to relate to specific religious traditions. For many, it has become 'a general code word for the search of direction, purpose, and meaning related to the deepest dimension of human existence' (King, 1998, p.96) and so, spirituality is no longer:

...exclusively based on an a priori theological standpoint, but is rooted in a search, in experimentation, questioning and exploring. (King, 1998, p.96)

An absolute distinction between spirituality and religion is not easily made. 'The domain of religion is related to, though is not straightforwardly identifiable with, the domain of the spiritual' (Alexander and McLaughlin, 2003, p.358). Both employ the same metaphors and images such as 'pilgrimage' or 'transformation'; religious and nonreligious spirituality seek answers to the same kind of questions of purpose and destiny. But the terms are not interchangeable. According to Yob (2003), religion indicates more than spirituality; it refers to:

...the accoutrements designed to nurture and promote spirituality: the systematised beliefs, prescribed behaviours, a community of followers, supported by specific sacred texts, rituals, art, music, architecture, authorities and traditions. (p.115)

Spirituality, in turn, indicates more than religion. It may be sustained and prompted by religion but may be nurtured from other sources such as 'secular works of art, natural phenomena, dreams, the experience of an accident, illness, or the death of a loved one' (Yob, 2003, p.115).

Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) compare what they identify as 'religiously 'tethered' and 'untethered' conceptions of spirituality' (p.359). Religiously tethered spirituality includes the discovery of meaning and purpose through devotion, contemplation or consciousness, manifested in a search for the divine through prayer, sacred study or participation in ritual and ceremony, and ethical concerns related to a 'religiously inspired vision of the good life' (p.359). In contrast, religiously untethered spirituality involves beliefs and practices that are disconnected from or 'even discomfiting to, religions' (p.359).

Key differences between religiously tethered and untethered spiritualities are illustrated through five interrelated strands that appear to make up the 'spiritual domain' (p.359):

- i. The first strand emphasises a search for meaning; a personal quest for what is valuable and significant in human life. In a religious context, this quest is conducted within a framework of particular belief and value; it is a search for what is sacred or religious truth. By contrast, an untethered quest may be little more than 'an apprehension that there is something more to life than is apparent on its surface' (p.359).
- ii. The second strand involves 'the cultivation of inner space' (p.359). In a religious context this is connected with centredness or stillness, cultivated in an ordered way, through prayer or meditation. In an untethered context, this can be less specific and more diffuse, allied perhaps to therapy.
- iii. The third strand is to do with how spirituality influences one's life, orientations, dispositions and motivations, for example through personal qualities such as self-control, self knowledge, humility, calmness, gratitude or love. In religiously tethered conceptions, these are 'related to and articulated in terms of, the vision of the person, the 'good life' and the spiritual development that the religion in question embodies' (p.360). This vision will include a view of how such qualities are to be balanced and prioritised to give shape to human life. In untethered spirituality, this view may be much more piecemeal and disconnected from wider questions about meaning or significance.
- iv. The fourth strand stresses responses to the natural and human world, such as awe, wonder or reverence; in religiously tethered spirituality, these are informed by religious belief. Outside a religious framework they are likely to be more open.
- v. The fifth strand is communal: spirituality - religiously tethered or not - often has a relational, collective or social dimension, providing a shared sense of meaning, belonging and commitment.

Such a separation may be useful, but only if it deals with each of the identified elements of spirituality in a manner that can be justified. It could be argued that Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) offer an incomplete analysis of the term, underplaying those spiritualities that appear not to be primarily about a search for meaning, a phrase itself laden with religious connotations. For example, gay spirituality may, at least in part, be more concerned with spiritual values relating to diversity, human responsibility and uniting sexuality and spirituality

(Clark, 1996), and feminist spirituality with identity, difference and transformation, opening up new ways of seeing (Levitt, 1996).

Similarly, Alexander and McLaughlin (2003) leave unexamined the possibility that the religiously tethered practices that they associate with the 'cultivation of inner space' (p.359) such as prayer, can be reduced to rule following; the observance of ritual becoming an end in itself, lacking in spontaneity and even, perhaps, oppressive. In contrast, an untethered version could be seen positively as free, liberating and fulfilling. The language of their separation itself appears to be favourably skewed towards the religious. Religiously tethered spirituality is afforded an attractive certainty, whilst its secular counterpart is cast as woolly and vague. However, it may be argued that such tolerance of ambiguity is a characteristic of nonreligious spirituality that is to be welcomed more widely.

For Hull (2002) spirituality includes religion, but is more comprehensive. Religion as a whole is concerned with spirituality but not all spirituality is concerned with religion. For him, 'everything that is truly religious is also spiritual but there may be spirituality outside religion' (p.171). Crucially, it is religion that sets 'human life against its ultimate limit' (p.173). So religion holds within it the 'potential for highest spirituality' (p.173). Culture, for example, art, literature, music or science, has the capacity to lift human beings above biological survival and so has a spiritual dimension; 'it helps humans transcend their earlier achievements' (p.174) and become truly human. But it is religion that attempts to bring human beings to the limits of what it is to be human by exposing them to the ultimate. Thus 'religions represent the most highly developed forms of human spirituality' (p.175).

In fact, what Hull (2002) seems to be proposing is a sort of staged hierarchy of spirituality, ranging from the secular, found through the arts, music and so on, to the religious, found through encounter with and in the presence of the divine. This raises important questions: Is such a view sustainable? Is it really not possible to inform one's life and actions with the love for others and lack of self-regard that some would see as the highest expression of human spirituality, except through the promptings of a religious tradition?

Hull's (2002) hierarchy is based on increasing degrees of transcendence; transcendence in his view being the defining feature of a developed spirituality. However, it is possible to take a different view. Blake (1996) argues that the defining feature of spirituality is contingency; that is, its capacity to open up the possibility of being 'other', of being something else. By confronting what it is to be this and not that (for example to be human and not animal), we can heighten our sense of what it is to be fully human. Blake (1996) argues that spiritual awareness means moving beyond the transcendental to something more fundamental - the immanent; that which pervades the universe around us. Contingency allows better self-understanding because it can enable us to see ourselves in relation to other things around us

and so other potentialities become conceivable. In other words, we can experience the spiritual through an understanding of our contingency with the world around us; a heightened awareness of our humanity through interaction with the world and its experiences. Transcendence on the other hand conceives the spiritual as outside or apart from the world; something to be discovered beyond it.

If Hull (2002) acknowledges the legitimacy of nonreligious spirituality, albeit rather less formed than that developed through religious experiences, others are less sure. For Sheldrake (1999) spirituality is:

...the study of how individuals and groups appropriate traditional Christian beliefs about God, the human person, creation and their interrelationship and then express these in worship, fundamental values and life-style. Thus, spirituality is the whole of life viewed in terms of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the indwelling of the Spirit and within the community of believers. (p.57)

Carr (1996) sees current talk of spirituality in schools as 'fast and loose' (p.159) and in urgent need of conceptual clarity. He acknowledges, however, that in common usage, the term includes experiences that do not have religious connotations. But he remains sceptical of what he calls 'reductive' spirituality (p.161), which simply refers to that which is remarkable, mysterious or inexplicable in ordinary experiences. For him, contemporary thinking of this kind about spirituality in schools uses language that is 'hardly more than a pious way of celebrating human experience' and amounts to:

...little more than the assertion that young people should be encouraged to seek personal fulfilment through religious participation or artistic creativity or value such activities highly. (p.161)

Therefore, these encounters with wonderment are no more than what good teaching should be about anyway. Meaningful spirituality, on the contrary, has its roots in a deepening acquaintance with a religious tradition and a tradition of spiritual enquiry.

For Thatcher (1999), it is the gradual separation of spirituality from theology which lies at the heart of the current confusion attached to the term. For him, the term is surrounded by such conceptual chaos that he doubts that a conception of 'spirituality without theology is even coherent' (p.4). However, his insistence that spirituality is meaningless outside the investigation of religious truth does not appear to recognise the depth of human experience available to those who are not concerned with religious understanding. In contrast, for Dunne (2003), the spiritual dimension of human life is revealed through:

...our vulnerability to suffering and our inevitable journey towards death, our exposure to sadness and grief – not least our often unfathomable attachments to others – and our capacity to be moved to joy and gratitude by the goodness and beauty of the world reveal the spiritual dimension of life. 'Soul' or 'spirit' here owes nothing to metaphysical arguments about immaterial substances nor does it presuppose religious faith. Rather,

religion itself would scarcely be intelligible were human beings not spiritual in the sense just specified. (p.107)

Similarly, Hay (Hay with Nye, 2006) argues that even those with misgivings about religion emphasise the link between spirituality and religion, perhaps suggesting that religion springs from spirituality or that it is 'the fuel which enables the vehicle of religion to operate' (p.20). Moreover, there are many who would use the word spiritual or describe their own spirituality without acknowledging commitment to a religious tradition or faith community. So subscribing to religious belief does not appear to be a necessary condition for spiritual activity, at least as the term is commonly used and understood.

Others argue that spirituality can legitimately be conceptualised as the way one experiences the world and lives one's life, not necessarily with belief in God or membership of a religious community. 'It is much more like what John Dewey called 'the religious attitude' and signifies what one attends to and acts upon in daily experience' (Van Hess, 1996, p.2). He argues:

Secular spirituality is neither validated nor invalidated by religious varieties of spirituality. Its status is related to them but separable. This separation is more easily made if what is spiritual is conceived in phenomenological rather than metaphysical or institutional terms. (Van Hess, 1996, p.1)

Copley (2000) suggests that what is needed is not ambiguity or reduction of spiritual language to a secular 'common denominator' at all (p.139). In his view, if secular language comes to dominate discourse, by implication religious conceptions of spirituality become inferior. So religion, by inference, becomes 'one coat that spirituality might wear' (p.139). Thatcher (1999) supports this view, arguing that the debate on spirituality in educational circles is dominated by secularity. Copley (2000) finds such privilege is inappropriate and argues that, though institutional Christianity (in the United Kingdom) is declining, a similar decline in unorthodox or vaguely or broadly Christian belief remains to be demonstrated. Therefore, an atheistic or secular language of spirituality is 'fundamentally unrepresentative' (p.140). What is really needed is a secular language complemented by that of religious traditions, for 'in a scenario in which all language is limiting, we need the fullest range to explore describe and transmit experience' (p.142).

2.2.3 A private, unworldly spirituality

As well as its association with religious practice, spirituality tends to be cast as an individual matter, concerned with the private, inner life and separated from the material world. The story of its applications charts the separation of the term not just from its religious roots, but its association with withdrawal from bodily and worldly matters and concerns. King (1998) describes this emerging bifurcation:

In a traditional Christian context spirituality – spiritualitas – was closely connected with the celebration of the Christian mysteries, particularly the eucharist; it was linked with the Christian ideals of holiness and perfection preached by the gospel. The word spirituality eventually found its way into different European languages, and from 1500 onwards spirituality could mean the quality or condition of being spiritual, and regard for things of the spirit as opposed to material or worldly interests. This understanding indicates the presence of a strong polarity, often developed into a sharp and exclusive dualism whereby the spiritual was seen as distinct from, and frequently opposed to, the material, bodily and temporal. (p.100)

On this view, spiritual concerns could be compromised by engagement with the world. So the traditional Christian monastic vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were encouraged because wealth, sensual indulgence and self-will were seen to be impediments to a devout spiritual and religious life (Blake, 1996).

In stark contrast, for Thatcher (1999), from a traditional Christian perspective, belief in the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, makes nonsense of the conceptual separation of the temporal from the spiritual:

Those who seek to identify spirituality with a non-material dimension to life seem to have become prey to a philosophical and religious dualism which ignores the material conditions which are needed for the spiritual life to be a possibility. Indeed the belief in a God who becomes flesh provides the ultimate refusal of a theology or theory of human nature that does not begin with embodiment. (p.4)

Blake (1996) is also sceptical of a version of spirituality that is separated from the world and its concerns from the inner dimension of life. He questions the apparent tendency, particularly in spiritual education in schools, to rush to great spiritual themes, ignoring the importance of the mundane in either supporting or inhibiting spiritual wellbeing. He concludes:

Spirituality does not require an easy life. But it does call for a full involvement in that mundane life we have. (p.453)

Similarly, Carr (1996) argues that, in schools, spirituality has been equated with that which is remarkable or mysterious in commonplace curricular experiences rather than with a particular dimension of human experience itself.

Attempts to develop a more inclusive version have tended to reassert the position of spirituality as a defining dimension of all human beings, the 'quest for full humanity' (King, 1998, p.100). So, Hull (2002) is emphatic in his rejection of the notion that 'the spiritual is a separable part of the human' (p.172), arguing that the spiritual is an aspect or dimension of what is it to be human, rather than a separate part or section. For him, it refers to the 'achievement of human being' (p.172) and enables the human to transcend the biological, to realise the potential of our biological natures by transcending the limits of our own bodies. So, in making music we transcend 'mere noise'; in thinking mathematically we 'transcend the

particular' (p.173). Through activities like these, we 'perceive the spirituality of the human being realised' (p.173). In this sense, of course, transcendence means breaking through our 'current knowledge and view of our place in the world' (p.173).

For McGhee (2003), the capacity for transcendence is what connects the spiritual to the moral and yet distinguishes the concepts. The link is made through the idea of intensification. So, qualities that might be regarded as moral may attain the status of spiritual because they do not represent fixed possibilities, but are capable of development and of moving towards the transcendent through what McGhee (2003) calls a 'spiral transcendence' (p.28). He gives a personal example, from within the Christian tradition, of compassion; that of a movement from his own human sense of compassion to that of Christ for all humankind through increases in force and intensity.

Dunne (2003) approaches the problem from a slightly different perspective. He argues that everyone, inescapably, is spiritual:

...in the sense that there is some overall orientation to their lives, some assumption, however implicit, of what matters most or is worthy of care. (p.99)

So, a conception of the spiritual that simply sets it in opposition to the material will not do. This is because the spiritual is to do with how various aspects of material life 'are disposed and valued' (Dunne, 2003, p.99). So it is possible for the affirmation of ordinary life, such as the concern to prolong life or ameliorate suffering to be a powerful strand in any contemporary spirituality, religiously-based or not.

Yob (2003) suggests that this division has short-changed both spirit and body, prohibiting a conception of the spirit 'drawing its energy and inspiration from the rest of life's experiences or finding expression or development in otherwise secular or bodily activity' (p.114). According to Wright, (2000) echoes of this separation may be found in contemporary attacks on materialism and consumerism and evidenced in attempts to cultivate alternative non-materialistic life styles or spiritualities. What is really needed is a construction of spirituality that addresses the relationship between spirit and matter in a way that gives both their rightful due as 'parts of the whole of what we know as human life in its fullness' (Yob, 2003, p.114).

King (1998) and Sheldrake (1999) both chart the gradual movement of spiritual life to the margins of Christian theology and of society at large and its development into a mainly private mode of religious expression through the interior life; subjective and abstract, a series of contemplative exercises focussed on the inner dimension of human experience. According to King (1998) this development was highly influential in post-Reformation spirituality (for example through the Jesuits and Ignatius Loyola's 'Spiritual Exercises'); over the following

centuries a mystical, ascetical conceptualisation of spirituality developed, based on highly abstract texts on the inner life.

Blake (1996) sees a contemporary expediency in relegating the spiritual (in this sense, linked to Christian tradition) to the private. So, he attacks those who attempt to restrict the role and discard public pronouncements of established religious leaders by arguing that the church's role is spiritual, not political. He concludes that in this way Christian spirituality has been used as a stick with which to beat the churches and a device for the privatisation of religion; less perhaps as 'an opiate of the people than a bromide for the clergy' (p.445). In terms of school leadership, such dualism may give rise to a reading of spirituality as a private matter, separate from public concerns. The danger of conceiving headteachers' spirituality in this way is that such a version of spirituality is ultimately disempowering, able to offer only private succour instead of prompting public, critical engagement with the systems and procedures that regulate heads' work (Chater, 2005).

Some argue even more forcefully that spirituality is a highly relational concept and indeed that a withering of the spirit is characterised by increasing isolation and alienation (Hay with Nye, 2006). In discussing 'relational consciousness' (p.109) which is identified as a deep-lying expression of spirituality in young children emerging from his research with Nye, Hay comments that 'a holistic relationship with the rest of reality is central to the nature of spirituality' (Hay with Nye, 2006, pp.131-132). He argues that selflessness itself is an expression of spiritual awareness:

...every form of self-sacrificing behaviour – whether it is concern for people with whom one has no connection either genetically or socially, or defence of the planetary environment – can be seen as a function of spiritual awareness. (p.135)

On this construction, spiritual growth may be characterised, in part, as an increasing prioritisation of human relationships, sense of service to others and inspiration to live in solidarity with others, for religious believers, inspired by the divine (Terry, 1993; Timmerman, 1993; Hull, 2002).

Similarly, Bhindi and Duigan (1997) argue for a spirituality 'which calls for the rediscovery of the spirit within each person and a celebration of the shared meaning and purpose of relationship' (p.119). They do not hold a view of spirituality that links to a particular religious view, rather that 'individuals and groups should experience a senses of deep and enduring meaning and significance from an appreciation of their interconnectedness and interdependency' (p.126). It is the job of organisational leaders, for them, to promote such connected meaning-making in others. Where spirituality is religiously-based, such relationships are lived out with a sense of the divine. For Christian believers, true love of others is equivalent to love of God and so 'must express the same spirit as prayer and

contemplation' (Peperzak, 2005, p.26). So believers are to develop a style of 'speaking, feeling and behaving' and a 'charitable style of communication' (Peperzak, 2005, p.27). For leaders who are committed Christians, it is in the quality of relationships that their Christian witness is to be found.

Others have sought to reconcile and meld an individualised, interior notion of spirituality with its apparent place in the experiences of life in slightly different ways. Halstead (1997, p.99) for example, talks of 'two dimensions' at work in spiritual development. One looks inwards and is to do with 'personal identity and individual development' and the other outwards, to do with spiritual responses to life, such as 'living for others'. Newby (1994) sees spirituality as concerning 'the inner person' (p.1) but the mark of spiritual maturity as developing 'sensibility to the lives of others' (p.13) and living in a manner that is conducive to 'the happiness of others' (p.21). Hull (1996) makes an important distinction between a personal spirituality that is sought for its own sake (perhaps reflecting a dominant hegemony of commerce and self-interest) and that which is 'embodied' (p.42) in response to human needs and human solidarity. For him, spiritual education is to do with the inspiration to 'live for others' (p.43).

2.2.4 Authenticity and spirituality

Terry (1993) links spirituality and relationality through the notion of authenticity, which he regards as a crucial attribute of successful school leaders. He argues that the actions of leaders who behave authentically, that is, worthily and honourably with an integrity based on reflection and personal understanding, are 'spiritually grounded' (p.274). Authenticity (like spirituality) is not simply a matter of remaining true to oneself; it is premised on the notion of a shared human condition. Consciousness of community and social responsibility are emphasised by Terry (1993) as characteristics of authentic leaders. For him authenticity is essential in leadership, helping leaders to 'frame issues and discover true answers' (p.129). It is bound up in avoiding self-deception and guided by genuineness and trustworthiness. He is critical of any definition or usage that 'gives insufficient weight to our social interdependence' (p.110). So, authentic leadership is about taking:

...responsibility for ourselves in concert with others, seeking to create and build a global commonwealth worthy of the best that we as human beings have to offer. (p.275)

Like spirituality, it is rooted in an intense sense of interconnectedness as much as personal principle.

More directly, Tacey (2004) writing from a Christian perspective, spells out what just what spiritual authenticity may look like. He, like Terry (1993), is suspicious of a spirituality that downplays its relational aspects. He warns that a spirituality conceived without a communal dimension, in private isolation – a purely individual matter – has the potential to bring only

appalling, alienated loneliness. Spiritual authenticity, on the other hand, through the lens of his faith, 'draws us into the larger world and makes us subordinate to a greater will that transcends us on all sides' (p.146). It demands attention to 'the needs of the other' (p.147). So, for Tacey (2004) there is an inherent connection between spiritual authenticity, service and disregard of self.

2.2.5 Postmodernism and spirituality

The conception of spirituality as an individual matter lies at the heart of a postmodern version of the term, though in this context, individualisation is related to construction of a personal spiritual identity, rather than separation from the world. For King (1998) postmodernism involves:

...the celebration of diversity and recognises that ambiguity and complexity are present in all intellectual, political and cultural conditions. (p.94)

It replaces certainty in knowledge with processes of deconstruction, questioning and layered interpretation. Truth is conditional, tentative and shaped by context. Therefore established religious traditions and a spirituality rooted in such traditions are likely to be rejected (Sheldrake, 1999). Taggart (2002) notes that the fragmentation that characterises postmodernism prevents the construction of overarching metanarratives of the human condition (though such a view in itself constitutes a metanarrative): instead micronarratives of everyday life and work are used to organise meaningful accounts of human experiences. But in emphasising such diversity, difference becomes an 'absolute value' (Taggart, 2002, p.63), a desirable end in itself, and so has the effect of encouraging the proliferation of niche markets and endless varieties of consumer identity.

In this context, it is argued, spirituality itself is prone to commodification; it, too, becomes splintered, hybrid and subject to market forces; another desirable brand in the niche market. Such spirituality is incapable of challenging the acceptance of materialism that stifles imagination and integrity or balancing the rational, scientific, economic and industrial principles that appear to dominate contemporary society; it offers no challenge to 'capitalistic modes of production, representation and consumption' (Gur-Ze'ev, 2005, p.229).

Carrette and King (2005) argue that spirituality 'has no universal meaning and always reflected political interests' (p.30) and that it is this ambiguity and 'ability to carry multiple meanings' (p.31) that has led not just to its current commodification, but to its being used to establish a market niche. So, in their view, the term is currently being employed in the business world and consumerist society as a "brand-label' for the search for meaning, values, transcendence, hope and connectedness in 'advanced capitalist' societies' (p.32). They contend that 'new forms of engaged spirituality' (p.182), perhaps drawing on established

religious traditions and grounded in mutuality, social justice and economic sustainability may prove to be the best hope for resisting the excesses of neoliberal capitalism.

Without a metanarrative, a 'spirituality of dissent' (Gearon, 2001, p.141) is impossible because spirituality becomes simply a pragmatic, personal construction drawn only from accumulated everyday experiences, though these may include religious traditions, incomplete and provisional and so incapable of becoming a common concern. Gur-Ze'ev (2005) is in no doubt that current calls for spirituality, improving one's life and spiritual education are no more than passing fashion. Spirituality has become a commodity and therefore cannot resist the commodification all around. While such fragmented spirituality uses the 'language of critique' (p.229) in reality it merely reflects and serves the attitudes, constructions and experiences of the postmodern era.

Ward (1998) takes a different position, but comes to similar conclusion about the postmodern condition. He argues that our age does indeed have a metanarrative - that of evolutionary science - but that it is incomplete, problematic and has difficulty in accounting for aspects of human living such as consciousness, moral obligations and belief. In its extreme form, this narrative appears to suggest that these things have an evolutionary basis; that they are no more than responses to psychological insecurities, the function of randomly generated genes or chance mutations which have some survival value (Ward, 1998). On this account, in the absence of a metanarrative of meaning, purpose or value, human life is driven only by selection and impersonal natural processes and truth and reason can vary. This is the aimlessness of the postmodern condition.

Ward's (1998) view though, fails to take full account of what a scientific metanarrative does have to offer. It could be argued that such a narrative calls, entirely appropriately but perhaps surprisingly, for a traditional spiritual response of awe, or possibly humility, in the face of creation (Mooney, 2003). Dawkins (2004), for example, reports his own 'profound sense of the sacred' (p.135) evoked by poetry, music or natural phenomena, arguing that the scientific search for an explanation of what he calls 'poetic imagination' (p.137) should not demean it. It could also be argued that Ward (1998) is simply mistaken: that the dominant metanarrative of our time is not so much that of evolutionary science, but liberal capitalism, market fundamentalism and commodification, though there may be some connection between the two. Some see the 'new' spirituality as a response to this empty, encroaching materialism, with its emphasis on commercial consumerism that has developed over the last decade or so. On this version, the 'new' spirituality is an attempt to articulate the worth of those things that do not have market value. For example, Brooks (2003), reports that *Cosmopolitan* magazine had appointed a 'spirituality editor' in response to an identified 'growing congregation of "spirituality seekers" among its readership'. These are young women who have rejected 'the round-the-clock strictures of formal religion in favour of a more ad hoc blend of beliefs'. Such

spirituality may represent a search for peace of mind, consolation and healing in an aimless world. However, Brooks (2003) is unconvinced, arguing that it knits together only the 'cosiest aspects' of existing faith traditions, requiring only minimal intellectual or moral rigour. Such 'spiritual tourism', she warns, ignores the more demanding, uncomfortable aspects of belief, such as the call to love your neighbour, that work against 'self-interest and personal autonomy'. There is a problem though, in being too critical. Such consumerism may well be a response to postmodern aimlessness and materialism, but Davis (2004) warns that:

...while it is tempting to merely dismiss passing fashions of this kind, it may be worth considering some of the more serious questions that lie behind them. (p.683)

He goes on to suggest that the attention given to consumerist spirituality in popular journalism may be a potent, uncomfortable signal that contemporary educational thought has excluded or devalued a proper concern for what it is to be human.

In contrast to Taggart (2002), King (1998) argues that postmodernism opens up positive opportunities to shape new attitudes and understandings, including those related to spirituality. Postmodernism - seeing the world from potentially incompatible perspectives - requires 'unflinching honesty and scrupulous self-reflection' (King, 1998, p.95). So it provides rich opportunities for challenge and acknowledgement of differences; to explore how different social perspectives offer different views of the world; to explore each person's story, including those that may have their foundations in traditional religious belief. Similarly, Mooney (2003) argues that this cross-fertilisation has rich potential; the breakdown of conventional cultural boundaries 'has enriched people's lives in ways that defy analysis' (p.5). And anyway, the spirit of postmodernity is to question everything, 'but that is not necessarily at odds with a sense of the religious' (Mooney, 2003, p.5). Such questioning can be driven by a profound sense of the spiritual.

King (1998) goes on to suggest that new attitudes are needed, that simply reviving or returning to past forms of spirituality, rooted in religious traditions, will not satisfy contemporary needs. Furthermore, she argues, that without spirituality in its broadest, inclusive sense, the fragmentation and aimlessness that afflict postmodern society can become superficiality and chaos. The key question is how spirituality can respond to postmodern times.

Current writing appears to have little to say on the relationship between postmodernism and school leadership, except to suggest that postmodernism might:

...provide a reasonable foundation for an ongoing effort to build a theory that might begin to legitimate the practise of democratic leadership in schools. (Starratt, 2001, p.347)

Few clues to how leaders are expected to operate in such a fluid context of multiple subjective truths, realities and interpretations have been offered (Bush and Glover, 2003). Starratt (2001) associates postmodernity with democracy and so argues for a more consultative, inclusive form of school leadership. However, postmodern ideas of diversity, fragmentation and the construction of 'self' may provide some insights into the nature of headteachers' personal and professional spiritualities. For example, such spiritualities could be discerned through heads' understanding and toleration of multiple, perhaps contradictory, opinions and the respect and attention they give to individual differences (Bush and Glover, 2003). Headteachers' capacities to seek and promote reconciliation may be important in this context.

2.2.6 A countercultural spirituality

In the Christian tradition, spiritual, moral and social concerns and actions are interconnected. Writing from a Catholic perspective, Grace (2002) notes that, for the believer:

There can be no authentic love of God (a manifestation of the spiritual) which is not, at the same time, linked to living a good life (a manifestation of the moral) and to loving and helping one's neighbour (a manifestation of social concern). (p.205)

More generally, others have suggested that any notion of spirituality that does not include an active response to social concerns is incomplete. For example Gearon (2001) argues that current attempts to describe spirituality are inadequate because they underestimate the historical and political context in which a sense of being or meaning is developed and through which it is formed. He is critical of contemporary models of spirituality as they are presented in western educational contexts: 'the glib reiteration of "awe and wonder", the preoccupation with "self development" at the expense of community, the occasionally vacuous emphasis on "creativity" ' (p.154). He proposes instead a 'spirituality of dissent' (p.153). Such a spirituality would be rooted in 'a consciousness of human fragility itself' (p.154) in the current context of global, cultural and political violence and systematic violation of human rights. In turn, it may 'appropriate answers from the prophetic traditions' (pp.154 -155) that have traditionally dealt with such issues of social justice.

Hay (2001), writing in the context of spiritual education in schools, makes a complementary point. Referring to his research with young children (Hay with Nye, 1998), Hay (2001) argues that 'relational consciousness' (p.108) is the precursor of spirituality, because it is such consciousness that allows the possibility of relationship to the divine or, for non-believers 'the possibility of a holistic relation to the Other' (p.108), however that is conceived. If this is so, relational consciousness must underpin ethics; the result of such connectedness and immersion in the physical and social world 'is the experience of a shortening of the psychological distance between oneself and one's surroundings' (p.108).

It could be argued that exercising relational consciousness is a countercultural act. In fact Hay (2001) sees spiritual education in this subversive light as its purpose, in his view, is to reawaken the relational consciousness of the young that contemporary western society neglects and allows to wither. It is also a political act because relational consciousness implicitly subverts the assumptions of individual self-interest that appear to have been assimilated by at least some of those who manage contemporary economic and commercial life.

Carrette and King (2005) argue that the meanings and usage attached to spirituality over the centuries reflect particular ideological positions. Currently, they maintain, the term has been individualised on the one hand, removed from its demanding, uncomfortable religious roots and repackaged to provide a 'positive gloss' (p.171) for corporate interests on the other. They continue:

Nevertheless, in challenging the colonisation of our collective cultural heritage by individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality, we have inevitably emphasised what they have silenced within those traditions, namely a concern with community, social justice and the extension of an ethical ideal of selfless love and compassion towards others. (p.171)

Erricker (2004) sees spirituality as inherently opposed to current global market trends and argues that:

...theoretical constructs of the spiritual, whether theologically or academically constructed, are of little use unless their aim is to activate change through critical dissent. (p.158)

In this sense, spirituality is not about cosy neutrality. Rather, it is about challenge to and subversion of the 'dominant paradigm of our time' (p.159), rampant free-market capitalism. It is a dissenting spirituality. Similarly, Taylor (2005) acknowledges the disruptive potential of spirituality and sees such challenges as a potentially creative source of disturbance, opening up new possibilities for social action.

In the context of organised Christian religious institutions, Tacey (2004) describes a historical tension between vibrant individual spirituality with its perceived capacity to lead to potentially dangerous and heretical diversity and the over-arching authority of established religious tradition. He warns: 'If it comes at too high a price for the institution, spirituality is banned or even persecuted' (p.33). A similar potential for conflict may exist when a personal, volatile spirituality confronts the constraints and demands of contemporary schooling.

Grace (2002) reports the inner conflicts experienced by Catholic heads in seeking to reconcile personal, deeply held commitments with the demands of a competitive market in schooling and the struggles of Catholic secondary schools to survive and prosper in a market-based

environment while maintaining an identity compatible with their religious foundations. He suggests that Catholic schools could be drawn into a secular academic success culture, whereby a spiritual and religious message has become simply contextual and not central to the purposes of the school. One head in his study commented (p.217):

So much emphasis is now placed on your targets...focussing in on performance so we're all preoccupied with two things, performance targets and actual achievements, as if this was the only matter that engaged the Catholic school. We've got to keep reminding ourselves that this is not just why we are here.

Such headteachers:

...find themselves at the meeting point between Catholic values in education, with an emphasis upon community and conceptions of the common good, and market values in education with an emphasis on individualism and on private good. (Grace, 2000, p.244)

This is the difficulty: Catholic school leaders, no matter how spiritually and ethically aware they may be, have to operate within the system. Real personal dilemmas are raised when marketing and managerial interests conflict with humane, educative, moral or spiritual purposes.

However, McLaughlin (2002, p.131) offers a different perspective, arguing that these conflicts and stresses may have deeper origins:

Contemporary Catholic schools are confronted with formidable challenges and dilemmas in formulating and enacting their distinctive vision, a burden which falls particularly upon the headteachers of these schools. These challenges and dilemmas do not arise solely from practical obstacles to the realisation of a vision of education derived in an unproblematic way from the Catholic tradition (say, those arising from the dominance of market values and imperatives in education). What is at stake in part is the proper interpretation of the tradition itself.

McLaughlin (2002) is pointing to the enormous complexities in the Catholic tradition of faith and the emergence of new models of what Catholic schooling may be, for example as a result of changing patterns of religious practice and commitment amongst its school population. The personal and professional tensions reported by Catholic heads above may not be entirely due to 'external' pressures from outside that faith community.

2.2.7 School leadership, spirituality and the search for a language of discourse

In contemporary writing on school leadership and management, the term spirituality is almost invariably used in its wider, plural sense and separated from religious traditions (Chater, 1998). For example, Starratt (1995) discusses spirituality and leadership in what he claims is 'nontheological language' (p.191), Day et al. (2001) in their study of successful headteachers talk of those leaders' spiritual values – care, integrity and honesty – as part of a strong

'religious or humanitarian ethic' (p.45) and Flintham (2003a) describes the spirituality that he seeks to associate with headship as one that does not have 'exclusively religious connotations' but includes 'a broader concept of secular spirituality' (p.8). Instead, according to Chater, (1998, p.236) the focus is on 'personal authenticity' and a spirituality developed through inner searching, contemplation, personal change and social interaction more than religious observance. However, though the readings of the concept in leadership and management writing may not be confined to religious traditions, the language of spirituality used tends to be grounded in traditional religious imagery and familiar to faith communities.

The search for a language in which a discourse of leadership and spirituality could be framed is problematic. It may be expected that headteachers would be familiar with and literate in dealing with the concept, given the requirement on them to provide opportunities for pupils' spiritual development in their schools. Heads of faith schools, who are generally committed believers, would appear to have particular access to common forms of thinking, albeit religiously-based, with which to grapple with the term. However, there is little evidence that headteachers who are committed to a religious tradition are, per se, more adept in discussing spirituality than nonreligious heads. Grace (2002) reports that in his study of Catholic secondary schooling:

...the answers of the headteachers on matters relating to spiritual development, as opposed to academic achievement, were more hesitant and tentative than most of their other responses. (p.215)

One headteacher stated, frankly: 'I don't really understand spirituality. I have to be honest. Spirituality has always been a bit of a mystery to me' (p.215). This is perhaps surprising, given that these headteachers may be expected to have a specific, vested interest in maintaining and developing the spiritual life of their schools. This uncertainty could be because headteachers of faith schools have little need to examine or articulate spirituality, either personal or professional; that issues of spirituality are simply subsumed in religious belief and practice, implicit and taken for granted. In the case of Catholic headteachers, it may be that they are simply unaware of Catholic spiritual traditions. Conversely, they may be aware of such traditions, but feel that they lack expertise and are unprepared to talk about them. In these ways, Catholic headteachers may be left floundering more than their secular counterparts; caught between their own uneasy relationships with Catholic spiritual traditions on the one hand and their lack of exposure to secular traditions on the other.

Even within the same broad Christian tradition, heads' interpretations of the spiritual are complex and nuanced, reflecting this ambiguity. In an interview-based study of the heads of six Catholic, seven Church of England and one Quaker primary school Johnson (2002) noted important differences in heads' perceptions of their functions and their interpretations of spirituality. For Catholic heads, a 'certainty and commonality' (p.217) in the process of

spiritual and moral development reflected an identity derived from Church teachings; Church of England schools, by contrast, 'placed little or no emphasis on the doctrinal position of the Church of England' (p.217). There was 'ambivalence and uncertainty' about the content and process of moral and spiritual development. The Quaker school was 'flexible and non-excluding' (p.217) in these processes. For Johnson (2002), these findings raise important issues concerning leadership styles and their 'associated stances toward change and toward religious traditions' (p.218).

Perhaps headteachers of both faith and community schools have little need to give voice to a personal or professional spirituality in any depth in the current climate of improvement, effectiveness and accountability. Grace (2000) claims that the language once associated with headship, defined by him as 'the guardianship of aspirations for a better world' (p.241) and so expressed in religious and transcendent discourse or equivalent humanist and secular terms, is seriously threatened by increasing marketisation in education. It is for this reason that he argues for a preparation for school leadership in which 'the discourse and understanding of management' is matched and balanced by 'a discourse and understanding of ethics, morality and spirituality'; a 'critical scholarship of leadership' (p.244).

The case for a revitalised language of spirituality is also made by Starratt (1995). He is writing from an American educational perspective, but his argument could apply arguably to the English schools' context:

But how to talk about that with colleagues who have been socialised into careers that find such language embarrassing, if not down right inappropriate? How to speak of spirit in a world that is sceptical, perhaps rightly so, of institutional religion, and sceptical too that anything that parades as leadership could possibly be altruistic. Rather, among modern, or even postmodern people of culture, education and accomplishment, there is hardly a vocabulary available to talk about matters spiritual that is not burdened with theological controversy, pietistic anachronisms, supernatural or superstitious implication, self-serving assumptions of a privileged righteousness, or fuzzy minded sentimentality. (p.190)

For him, a 'new prose of the spirit' (Starratt, 1995, p.190) is needed.

2.3 School leadership: pleasure and pain

The first part of the review of literature has explored the highly contested nature of spirituality, though this elusiveness, somewhat paradoxically, seems to offer opportunities for new exploration in the context of school leadership. As well as revealing fresh insights into the nature of the concept when it is associated with headship, this study sought to understand the ways in which any spiritual dimension in their lives discerned through the research shaped the practice of primary headteachers. It is necessary, therefore, to understand in broad terms what is already known about those factors that sustain, motivate or discourage school

leaders' in their work. Relationships feature prominently, reflecting the weight of evidence that they are key sources of both pleasure and pain to headteachers.

2.3.1 Sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance

Primary headteachers' relationships with their schools' communities are shaped in many different ways, for example by regulatory frameworks; ethical codes relating to their professional conduct; reformulated role boundaries following the merger of educational and social services into over-arching children's services (Lightfoot, 2009); less formal, but nonetheless powerful 'emotional geographies' that determine the patterns of 'distance' or 'closeness' in their dealings with others (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1056) and by their own values and motivations. Donaldson (2001, p.7; author's italics) argues that *'leadership is a relational, not an individual phenomenon'* and that it 'resides in interpersonal networks'. He notes, importantly, that heads' relationships are both collective and reciprocal; members of the school's community are simultaneously 'shapers of' and 'shaped by' (p.41) each other. It seems likely, then, that clues to the spiritual dimension may be found particularly in the complex interplay of relationships and their associated emotions that surrounds headship.

Those personal and professional influences that have affected headteachers' 'job related attitudes' (Evans, 2001, p.291) over the past twenty years or so do not appear to have changed a great deal (Early and Weindling, 2004). What may be described loosely as the experience of positive interpersonal relationships across the school's community is consistently identified as a key and important source of headteachers' continued enchantment with the job. For example, Chaplain (2001), citing the work of Hill (1994), reports that interpersonal relationships (with pupils as opposed to staff) and the autonomy that headship afforded offered most job satisfaction to primary headteachers at that time. Pascal and Ribbins (1998) in their study of primary headteachers' career development suggest that relationships with children are an important source of professional motivation and sustenance. Chaplain (2001), reporting interviews with primary headteachers, comments:

The quality of relationships, enabling and empowering others, enjoying their support and a shared focus were declared sources of great satisfaction. (p.208)

Early and Weindling (2004), reporting a longitudinal study of the changing nature of headship and the primary and secondary heads' role, note that:

...the key aspects of leadership which heads found most motivating, in all our research studies, centred chiefly on people management – interacting with staff and pupils. Both were crucially important motivators for heads. (p.43)

Similarly, a NCSL (2007) study of thirty-four headteachers which included slightly more female than male and both experienced and new primary and secondary heads reported that

developing others, that is 'seeing children progress, develop and succeed' and 'supporting teachers and staff' (p.58), offered the highest rewards and satisfaction, personally and professionally:

Half of those interviewed (50 per cent) felt that good relationships were important when considering the most rewarding and satisfying elements of the job. Staff relationships were seen to offer high levels of reward and satisfaction here. (p.60)

The NCSL (2007) study also found that the nature of the job itself was a high source of satisfaction. This included, for fifty per cent of the participants, the rewards associated with 'achieving things' (p.59) and thirty-five per cent saw leading the direction of the school and 'school improvement' as being especially 'satisfying and rewarding' (p.59). This aligns with the findings of Early and Weindling (2004) that opportunities to 'implement their own vision', to 'make a difference' and 'to give themselves a challenge' (p.43) are prominent amongst those factors which inspire teachers to want to become school leaders and those of Hayes (1996) who identified the opportunities to 'be their own boss', 'fulfil a vision' and 'make a mark' as significant incentives for applicants for small school headships (pp.382-383).

2.3.2 Sources of demotivation and distress

The NCSL (2007) survey identified a number of key sources of dissatisfaction for heads. Most prominent were 'internal resources and contextual issues' (p.61). These included (for seventy-four per cent of participants) staff issues which could be subdivided into organisational or management matters such as restructuring and 'Teaching and Responsibility' payments, staffing cuts and resignations and relationships. Unsurprisingly, their perceptions of negative relationships 'focussed on providing difficult and negative feedback to staff and dealing with competency matters' (p.61). This finding reflects that of Chaplain (2001) who, following his study of stress and job satisfaction among thirty-six primary headteachers, commented that, after the management of diverse and different areas of the school structures (budgets, maintaining standards and pupils' behaviour and learning), 'the most frequently reported stressors came from the quality of interpersonal relationships' (p.200). These concerns related to relationships with adults rather than pupils. Similarly, Nias (1996, p.300) notes that the most intensive, hostile and disturbing emotional encounters for teachers and heads relate to encounters with other adults.

For heads, the best and worst aspects of the job seem to be brought together through relationships with the school's community. Good staff relationships offer both professional and personal support in difficult times, for example in coping with bereavement in school. Conversely, dealing with staff, pupils or other members of the school's community when relationships have broken down, or become difficult, is a source of considerable distress:

A number of participants indicated that the feeling of being let down by colleagues had a negative impact at a personal level and on their role as headteacher... For some, dealing with these issues was felt to be both time-consuming and draining. (NCSL, 2007, p.62)

Similarly, Chaplain (2001) reports that in his study of primary headteachers interpersonal relationships could be either a source of satisfaction or distress. When relationships soured and a negative atmosphere developed, personal and emotional discomfort resulted, increasing heads' feelings of isolation.

2.3.3 Stress and decision-making

Primary heads' professional dilemmas are rooted in their schools' contexts and their, perhaps conflicting, relationships, commitments, values and beliefs. Understandably in these circumstances, decision-making can be a stressful, distressing business. In spite of this, rational models of decision-making processes seem to have had a pervasive influence in leadership writing (Bush, 2003). Decision-making is perceived as a process that is essentially iterative, enacted through a sequence of clearly defined stages from problem to solution and evaluation. The model itself seems normative, assuming that planned objectives or solutions are not contentious and value-free.

Alternative models seek to redress such neatness. The tidy, logical sequence portrayed by the rational model, it is claimed, rarely occurs in practice. Morley and Hosking (2003) argue that rational models are based on 'inappropriate models of persons, processes and contexts, and of the relationships between them' (p.44). They suggest, from a social constructivist position, that such models have little to say about what may be considered intelligent social action: the conversations and negotiations through which people and contexts are maintained, created and changed. For them, decision-making really relates to handling dilemmas: is about identifying and understanding the intricate relationship between dilemmas and the ability to negotiate an acceptable path through them; processes that expose leaders' emotions.

Reporting their study of the emotional impact of leadership activities on individual school leaders involving analysis of stories submitted by twenty-three educational leaders from across the USA, Ginsberg and Gray Davies (2003) highlight the 'agony of decision-making' (p.272). Prominent amongst the causes of leaders' distress were anxieties about the effect that their decision would have on others. 'They cared about their work; they cared about their employees; and they cared about the impact on everyone in the organisation' (p. 272). Similarly, Crawford's (2004) small-scale study of primary headteachers' emotions in England suggests that the sites of particular emotional intensity for heads are all 'people related' (p.23), for example making crucial decisions relating to staff redundancy or capability

procedures. Stressful events need not be cataclysmic to have serious and lasting effects; 'over time, everyday hassles can have a significant cumulative effect' (Chaplain, 2001, p.212). Of course, over time, what may be identified as stressors or sources of satisfaction can be perceived very differently. Feeling under pressure can be a source of motivation, but sustained for too long, can lead to distress and burnout.

Heads' feelings about themselves as well as others can be both motivators and sources of distress. For example, Hayes (1996) interviewed six headteachers of small primary schools. They had been attracted to small school headship by motives similar to those of the heads in Early and Weindling's (2004) study. However, after a time in post, the heads found that they were unable to cope with the many demands of the job. Hayes (1996) argues that the pressures of an intensive workload, combined with the perceived need to succeed in all aspects of the job, became both a source of professional strain and personal dissatisfaction as their professional identities were eroded. The demands of the job sapped both time and energy and, because there were so many demands, the inevitable neglect of some led to a sense of personal failure and self-doubt. Southworth (2004) remarks that this finding suggests that: 'it is as much the expectations the heads have of themselves as the actual pressures of the job which are the source of dissatisfaction' (p.17).

2.3.4 *The importance of context*

Nias (1996) notes that primary teachers 'invest their 'selves' in their work' (p.297) and that their sense of personal and professional identity is merged in the classroom. For headteachers, 'the school becomes a main site for their self-esteem and fulfilment, and so too for their vulnerability' (p.297). They regard their schools as 'canvases on which they can paint their ideals' (p.298). Not surprisingly, then, teachers' (and headteachers') self-esteem is enhanced when they feel that they are acting in accord with their beliefs and values. Conversely, they do not feel good 'if they feel that they are acting, albeit under pressure, in ways which run counter to these values' (p.297). Evans (2001) reporting her study of morale, job satisfaction and motivation among education professionals comments similarly that her findings led her to the interpretation that, 'it is perceived proximity to their conception of their job-related ideal that underpins individuals' job-related attitudes' (p.293). This ideal is organic and fluid, shaped by preference and priorities, reflecting individual needs, values and expectations and as such may vary from person to person.

Hayes' (1996) primary headteachers found themselves in contexts that were incompatible with their expectations and values; their self-images could not be sustained. Such dilemmas illustrate the difficulties of separating headteachers' and teachers' selves from their practice and the problems involved in maintaining a positive relationship between self and work. Indeed, maintaining the balance can be a source of confusion and distress. Conversely,

experiences of pain or frustration can be important sources of personal and professional learning (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004): responding to stress can be a valuable stimulus to reflection, self-knowledge and change which some may see as important spiritual capabilities.

Coping with the pressures and stresses of the job seems to relate to feelings of control: effective coping is facilitated by a sense of personal control (Chaplain, 2001). However, such personal control and close personal association with the school can be a double-edged sword:

...in that individuals could develop the belief that they are responsible for everything at all times, which can, in turn, lead to overwork, exhaustion and depression. (Chaplain, 2001, p.203)

It seems then that school leaders live and work in a complex context that is rich in contrasting emotions. Headteachers can be hurt or invigorated, inspired or embittered, their emotional equilibrium sometimes unbalanced by seemingly small events or demands (Chaplain, 2001). Given the association of spirituality with the emotions, it is necessary to understand their place in heads' lives and their effects on leadership practice in more detail to enable investigation of the spiritual dimension to progress.

2.3.5 Emotions, school leadership and spiritual activity

Spirituality is centrally concerned with the emotions (Halstead, 1997) and spiritual experience is, by definition, emotionally intense (Scheindlin, 2003). Deep currents of emotion can release a spiritual upsurge evidenced, for example, by acts of altruism, devotion or self-sacrifice, invoking a heightened awareness both of oneself and something beyond everyday life. The headteachers' spiritual experiences reported by Woods (2007) in her study of spirituality and educational leadership are highly emotional. Mike, for example, the head of a secondary school and a non-denominational Christian cited by Woods (2007) talked of 'profound experiences in his early life, such as 'mystical' experiences of overwhelming beauty in nature, as well as a powerful sense of a guiding hand' (p.148).

Emotions appear to have an important role in prioritising concerns and structuring human relationships, suggesting that they 'provide the frame within which people relate to each other' (Crawford, 2004, p.21), though emotions can disconnect people as well as having tremendous power to connect them (Beatty and Brew, 2004). Hargreaves (2001) adds:

Emotions are moral phenomena. They are closely bound up with and triggered by our purposes. At the same time, emotions help us choose among a variety of options in a highly complex world by narrowing down our choices. (p.1066)

In other words, emotions are, at least in part, closely related to those things that matters to us. They play a key role in thinking and decision-making (Damasio, 2006). Somewhat surprisingly, given its inherently relational nature, the emotional aspects of school leadership remain under-researched. After all, Nias (1996, p.296) argues that 'teaching is a job which involves interaction among people and inevitably therefore has an emotional dimension'. However, teaching (and headship) is distinct from other people-related professions. The job involves interactions with members of the school's community within a framework of professional responsibilities; encounters that can promote or hinder educational development. Therefore, heads' and teachers' interactions with people are imbued with educational purpose. So they experience not just the emotional demands of intensive work with people; they are also responsible for the quality of the school's emotional life (Nias, 1996).

Crawford (2004) suggests that the emotional, affective side of primary school headship is 'rarely remarked upon, except when acute cases of stress and burnout occur' (p.21). Beatty and Brew (2004) draw attention to the tacit emotional implications in a number of influential school leadership studies, but note that until recently 'emotion per se remained unexplored as a research focus' (p.330). Beatty (2000) remarks:

While the applicability to educational leadership of the principles and benefits of collaboration and the emotional skills required to promote and maintain collaborative cultures may seem self-evident, human emotions per se have been consistently marginalised in educational leadership research. (p.332)

Beatty and Brew (2004) suggest that school leadership is belatedly beginning to be reconceptualised as 'essentially relational' requiring school leaders to 'value and integrate emotion into their praxis if they are to develop successful schools' (p.330). They go on to suggest that, if this is so, future transformation in schools may rely on leaders' predispositions and practices in engaging with their own and others' emotions; valuing, integrating and collaborating in a shared emotional life.

Harris (2004) argues that current school leadership literature, because of its over-emphasis on 'bureaucratic and technical rational authority', equates leadership with 'management of systems and processes rather than the management of people' (p.393). Emotions and relationships are neglected. Yet these are, in her view, central in any attempt to explore and account for the highly differentiated success of schools in their attempts to improve. Harris (2004) goes on to postulate several conditions of the school leader's 'heart' (p.402) which are central to change and improvement in schools. These include:

creating a climate of trust where fears and anxieties can be articulated and teachers' efforts are not ridiculed or dismissed, allowing the school's community to confront its strengths and weaknesses to achieve growth and change;

the provision of the necessary time and space for self-esteem and positive relationships to develop; and

a willingness to accept a high degree of emotional exposure and so engender trust.

Where emotions have been mentioned, they are treated as 'little more than pesky interlopers, distracting us from a higher, rational purpose' (Beatty, 2000, p.334). Until comparatively recently, emotions have been regarded as pathological; an awkward interference with the school leaders' core business of rational decision-making. On the contrary, Beatty (2000, p.333) argues that the emotional experience of educational leaders is 'rich in potential to assist us in our understanding of leadership'. The image of a leaders acting rationally, denying or suppressing their emotionality, is enticing, suggesting as it does that the competing, messy strands of organisational life can be controlled and ordered (Crawford, 2004). The implication is that leadership activity is best asserted through control and suppression of the emotions. Moreover, school cultures themselves appear to support the notion that appropriate professional conduct requires the denial of emotionality. So Nias (1996, p.295), confirms that: 'emotional control is a characteristic of teachers, with both positive and negative effects upon their work'.

In recent years, the concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) has gained popularity. The need for those working in commercial, business and educational settings to develop such intelligence has become part of the rhetoric of leadership and management training. However, Scheindlin (2003) points out that the dominant theme of Goleman's (1995) work is 'the *management* of emotions' (p.187; author's italics), which seems now to have become almost synonymous with anger management. Goleman (1995) sees such managing as integral to success in the workplace, but it could be argued, on the contrary, that his conception is one that rather bleakly seeks to adapt people emotionally to the 'imperatives of organisational profitability' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1074). Comparatively little attention seems to be given to such things as experiencing and understanding emotions, communicating emotions to others or exploring emotions in depth. The danger of the emotional intelligence approach is that it can:

...conceptualise the particular management of emotion as just another workplace competence, and ignore the wider aspects of how a person functions in a given environment. (Crawford, 2004, p.21)

Beatty (2005, p.122) concludes:

It is not enough to be intelligent about emotions. Being emotionally intelligent and savvy to emotion's power in leadership is a start. But leaders need more than this if they are to be truly wise. Leaders need to make meaning with emotions, alone and with others.

A deepened, embodied respect for emotion's powerful presence in all our lives can inform good leadership and create community.

Though Beatty (2005) does not continue the point, such attempts to make meaning from emotional experiences, alone and in communion with others, not only suggest a link between leaders' emotions and spirituality, but place such activity at the heart of good leadership.

2.3.6 Emotional geographies and headship

Hargreaves (2001) comments that a counter-discourse to the more technical conceptions of the education process that have dominated policy and models of school leadership in recent decades has emerged and the neglect of emotions has begun to be remedied. However, he notes that the emotions of educators are still represented in largely personal, individual terms and a wider, contextual understanding is limited. Hargreaves (2001) argues that the particular way in which teaching and schools are organised is a powerful, but neglected, shaper of teachers' emotions. Such shapers include, of course, perceived professional tradition and the special emotional and relational expectations of teachers and school leaders (Carr, 2003) that form their identities and emotional experiences in particular ways as well as systemic procedures and processes. So teachers' and headteachers' emotional experiences are not just a function of individual disposition; the culture of teaching, like that of any other occupation, has its own 'emotional expectations, contours and effects on workers and clients' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1057).

The theoretical framework for Hargreaves' (2001) social and organisational analysis of teachers' emotions 'is grounded in two basic concepts: emotional understanding and emotional geographies' (p.1059). 'Emotional geographies' is used by him to describe 'the patterns of both closeness and distance in human interactions that shape the emotions we experience about relationships to ourselves, each other and the world around us' (p.1056). The term attempts to capture the particular patterns of closeness and distance that shape the emotions that teachers experience about their interactions with parents or carers. Hargreaves (2001) identifies five types of such interactions (socio-cultural, moral, professional, physical and political) and their consequences for relationships in the school's community.

The notion of 'emotional geography' is a complex one: 'There is no ideal or optimum closeness or distance' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1061) that has universal applicability; the geographies can be psychological as well as physical. They are not just 'structural or cultural conditions' (p.1062); teachers and headteachers work hard at configuring and reconfiguring emotional geographies in circumstances and contexts that may not be of their choosing. Hargreaves' (2001) concept of emotional geographies may helpfully 'identify the supports for and threats to' (p.1061) emotional bonds and understandings that arise from distance or closeness in interactions or relationships. Emotional understanding requires entering

meaningfully into the emotional experiences of others. Hargreaves (2001) draws upon the work of Denzin (1984) to describe how people call upon emotional understanding to:

...reach into the past store of their own emotional experience to interpret and unravel, instantaneously, at-a-glance, the emotional experiences and responses of others.
(p.1059)

Such emotional understanding can be established through a number of means, for example sharing emotional experiences such as births, weddings or bereavements. In school it may be nourished by experiences and episodes that encourage empathy with other peoples' lives and dilemmas. The alternative to emotional understanding is, of course, emotional misunderstanding. Where close relationships do not exist, according to Hargreaves (2001) responses can be misconstrued: for example, teachers' compliance and acquiescence can be interpreted as enthusiastic agreement by heads; their emotions being read as extensions of the head's. Therefore, for him, successful school leadership depends on creating the conditions that make emotional understanding possible.

Hargreaves' (2001) conceptualisations offer a further framework for analysis of their emotional responses inherent in the descriptions of relational events provided by the headteachers in this research study. For example, his concept of 'moral closeness' (p.1067), used to describe the emotional relationship that exists for example when teachers or headteachers receive positive feedback on their work from parents and carers, helps to shed light on how such comments reinforce a shared sense of purpose and provide positive encouragement to them (Woods, 2002; NCSL, 2007).

Hargreaves (2001) acknowledges his study's procedural limitations: it does not, for example, 'verify overall frequencies of emotional reactions and experiences' (p.1059) in teachers' work. In reality, too, there may be more fluidity and ambiguity between each interactional type than he suggests. It is possible to envisage a difficult relational encounter between a head and members of a school's community that creates both moral and socio-cultural distance; where the head's educational purposes and behavioural expectations are at odds with family practices. Nevertheless, the types of interactions and geographies identified by Hargreaves (2001) offer a helpful framework for scrutinising the relationships of heads with members of their schools' communities revealed through the research study. Crucially, his work establishes a pivotal conceptual connection between emotional geographies and emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983; 2003). A further link between these concepts and the idea of spiritual activity is made below through the work of Boyle and Healy (2003).

2.3.7 Schools as emotionally-rich environments: emotional intensification

Crawford, (2004) citing the work of Fineman (2000; 2001) describes the intensity of emotions in organisational life, defining and shaping its practices and processes. Boyle and Healy (2003) identify some organisations as particularly 'emotionally-laden' (p.351), for example, health or rescue services where dealing with life changing events such as birth or death is a daily occurrence. Primary headteachers are involved in a multitude of exchanges with members of the school's community during the school day. Some of these transactions can be pleasurable, others leave them 'feeling exposed, uneasy or sad' (Crawford, 2004, p.21). Though they rarely deal with the emotional extremes encountered, for example, by the emergency services, other emotionally demanding incidents come to the fore on a regular basis. Primary headteachers find themselves counselling at times of marital break-up, offering consolation at times of grief or intervening to protect children from harm (see, for example, Webb and Vuillamy 1996). In this sense, primary schools, if not emotionally-laden, may be considered to be at least emotionally-rich.

In such an environment, heads may find themselves undertaking 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983; 2003) in their work. Such labour, for her:

...requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others. (2003, p.7)

Though Hochschild's (1983; 2003) conceptualisation draws on the experiences of private sector service providers, the term may have use in other contexts. For heads, emotional labour is prompted when, in the work situation, they may feel one thing, but are expected to feel, or at least demonstrate that they feel, another. Indeed, it may be possible to conceive school leaders' work as requiring 'significant amounts of emotional labour' (Beatty, 2000, p.340), masking actual emotions and generating the appearance of others. On this construction, which emphasises its exchange value, such emotional labour can be 'largely negative' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1073) as it involves trading a part of oneself to motivate others towards the ends of the organisation in return for security or reward.

In a study of school leaders in Canada, Beatty (2005) describes the emotional intensification of current schooling, driven by current policy pressures: 'Policy pressures had the emotional effect of compressing leaders and ratcheting them into their roles as emotional labourers' (p.127). School administrators [headteachers] were expected to sell each new policy, putting a happy face on things with which they disagreed. These leaders were acting as emotional managers, continually needing to generate more and more optimism in others, 'while inwardly experiencing less and less of it themselves' (Beatty, 2005, p.128). Of course, continuous emotional labour of this kind may lead to emotional numbness and 'psychological and physical illness can result' (Beatty, 2005, p. 128).

Interestingly, Hargreaves (2001, p.1074) argues that disillusion and disenchantment need not necessarily be the outcomes of emotional labour, suggesting that its exchange value has been emphasised at the expense of its use value:

In her Marxian inspired analysis, Hochschild perhaps over-estimates the exchange value of emotional labour (as in profit value or emotional 'selling out' of a salesperson's smile), at the expense of the use value of such labour (what labour creates and recreates in oneself and in others when it leads to motivation, engagement, fulfilment or happiness) as an act of sincere emotional giving.

So, emotional labour may in fact be satisfying. Masking or managing emotions in particular circumstances can lead to fulfilment when leaders are able to act in accordance with their own values and the expectations that they have of their roles.

Boyle and Healy (2003) reporting a study of paramedics in Australia, draw together the important concepts of emotional intensification (which some would align to transcendence) and spiritual activity prompted by such experiences. Their paper synthesises the idea of emotionally-laden work and that of what may be identified as spiritual work, a link that is used in the research study to explore headteachers' responses to stressful events in schools. Boyle and Healy (2003) describe how emergency service crews were expected to display emotions of 'compassion, empathy and cheerfulness' (p.357), whilst simultaneously refraining from public expressions of sadness or grief. They were caught up in emotional balancing or switching and so engaged in sophisticated emotional labour. Emotional labour appeared to be used, for example, to restore their emotional equilibrium or balance at difficult and demanding times, such as in the initial chaos of a road accident. However, when conventional emotional management techniques were insufficient for this purpose, paramedics seemed to engage in what Boyle and Healy (2003) call 'spiritual work' (p.351). This may be a public 'performance' such as 'counselling grieving relatives when no other help is available' (p.360) or a more private activity that apparently helped paramedics to make sense of the experience. Maintaining a personal emotional equilibrium could involve a range of spiritual activities such as attending church, prayer or meditation.

Boyle and Healy (2003) describe how paramedics:

...draw upon their spiritual selves and experiences in order to renegotiate and rebalance their emotional selves when they have been placed out of kilter by the emotional demands of the workplace. (p.353)

Equilibrium is restored:

...through the accomplishment of spiritual work when the emotional demands of the job can no longer be assuaged through conventional emotional management techniques. (p.354)

For Boyle and Healy (2003) spiritual work is a dimension of emotional labour. It flows through emotional action, informed and attracted by a search for the divine or the power of a deep humanitarian ethic. However, the concept of spiritual work itself is a complex phenomenon:

We contend that people 'do' spiritual work in their social interactions, and that the doing of spiritual work is fundamentally about social interaction and relationships. Because spiritual work has to be continually accomplished through performance or ritual, what constitutes spiritual work is continually open to contestation. (Boyle and Healy, 2003, p.353)

For them, a comprehensive understanding of the nature of emotional labour is constrained by its limited use of insights from spiritual life. Boyle and Healy's (2003) suggestion that spiritual work, private or public, may be prompted by attempts to maintain emotional stability in the face of intensely demanding events appears to offer an additional, important perspective on headteachers' descriptions of their reactions to particularly demanding episodes in their work, for example the sudden, unexpected death of a young pupil (Bennett and Dyehouse, 2005) and provide useful clues to the nature of spiritual dimension in their lives. On this account, the spiritual dimension seems to be both open to episodic intensification and rooted in relationships with others.

What emerges from the growing interest in the emotional aspects of life in schools is a powerful argument that without an understanding of the emotional experience of school leaders, understanding of their leadership is incomplete, and by the same token, following the work of Boyle and Healy (2003), albeit in a different context, without an understanding of spiritual life, any understanding of the emotional experience of school leaders is equally incomplete.

2.3.8 Care

Spiritual activity can have its roots in a disposition to care. Noddings (2002), writing on the curriculum and moral education, links the cultivation of a capacity for care to spirituality through what she perceives to be a common concern with 'existential questions' (p.100). She argues that an education in care, for her the most important goal of schooling, requires that time is set aside for reflection on such 'spiritual matters' (p.100), as well the appreciation of, and wonder at, the technical, natural and man-made world.

Care in its general sense is seen as a characteristic of primary educators, though it is a complex and intricate concept (Nias, 1997; Noddings, 2002). Nias (1997, pp.12-20) identifies different ways in which caring may be used in the context of primary teaching: 'liking children'; 'altruism, self-sacrifice and obedience' (that is, a default of deference to those perceived to be in authority); 'conscientiousness'; 'quality in human relationships'; 'moral responsibility for children's learning' and 'personal investment, 'commitment' and guilt'. Enjoying being with

pupils is the 'more or less universal backdrop' (Nias, 1997, p.12) to other meanings of the term. At another level, though, the heads and teachers may establish more profound emotional relationships with their pupils. As Nias (1997, p.12) points out, liking 'is not the same as loving', and it is loving, with its implications of deep involvement, altruism and self-sacrifice that seems to relate caring to spirituality. There are historical reasons why primary heads and teachers may expect to care in this loving sense. One may be the religious origins of teacher education, perhaps socialising teachers into a view of their professional work as helping and serving, another may be because teaching has, historically, been 'likened to parenting' (Nias, 1997, p.13) or a form of mothering, reflecting the historical preponderance of female teachers in primary schools.

But providing loving care can be problematic. Giving without regard to personal cost may result in heads and teachers feeling depleted and burdened with guilt when they perceive that they have failed to meet the needs of their pupils. In fact, Nias (1997) argues that primary educators should decide to care about less, as they cannot fulfil all the expectations that are held of them, at least some of which are self-imposed. As Hargreaves (1994), citing the work of Rawls (1971) points out, such guilt is not simply a deep sense of disappointment with oneself or one's actions or omissions, it is also a moral emotion because it involves a recognition that harm has been done to others through what is perceived as personal failure. Caring relationships involve values and action. Hargreaves' (1994) notes, caring 'carries with it social and moral responsibilities as well as interpersonal ones' (p.146). Moreover, teachers' and headteachers' claims to care not just about pupils' welfare, but about their learning and the progress that they make also raise moral questions. As Nias (1997, p.19) puts it: 'What learning is in children's best interests to acquire' and 'To which children do we refer?'

Loving care, of course, may spiral through intensification to transcendence (McGhee, 2003) and can give way to compassion; the deep interconnectedness that some associate with spirituality. Tubbs (2005) points to the transcendence of individual identities that occurs when such interconnectedness allows an experience 'of unity over separation' (p.292). Armstrong (2009) comments that:

Compassion does not mean pity; it means 'experiencing with' the other...It requires a principled, ethical and imaginative effort to put self-interest to one side and stand in somebody else's shoes. (p.30)

Fox (1990) argues that compassion is born out of awareness of human mutuality and of common weakness; it is an 'awareness of togetherness' (p.4). Compassion may also call forth action to relieve the grief of others. In the Christian tradition, these are works of mercy. Terry (1993); Timmerman, (1993); and Hull (2002) each argue that spirituality is characterised by just such a rejection of relational barriers and that it calls for a surrender of self-

consciousness and self-sufficiency that is motivated by love for others and, in the case of a religiously-inspired spirituality, the divine.

2.3.9 Headteachers and bereavement in school

Perhaps dealing with bereavement in the primary school is one of the headteachers' most emotionally demanding and intense, but profound, personal and professional experiences, potentially, following Boyle and Healy (2003), prompting spiritual activity. Southworth (1995), reporting an ethnographic study of a male primary school headteacher 'Ron Lacey', observed that Ron's most harrowing memory of headship was 'spending two days with the parents of a pupil who had died' (p.134). Dyehouse (Bennett and Dyehouse, 2005) records a personal account of her experiences as a primary head and the processes by which the death of a pupil became a valuable learning opportunity within her school's community. She reflected: 'I hope I will never have to go through such an experience again' (p.26) and:

I know, as I write this to share with others who may find some help in its telling, that I am moved to tears, to sorrow, to smiles and I have learnt something about the humanity of us all. (p.27)

However, Macpherson and Vann (1996) noted that: 'Grief has received little attention in the literature of educational administration' (p.24) and Holland (2001) suggested that there is little systematic planning for dealing with bereavement in schools. More recently, schools and local authorities have begun to develop school emergency management plans, detailing agreed procedures and protocols for dealing with crises, including bereavement, in schools. Nevertheless, it remains the case that bereavement in school seems to propel headteachers to take the lead in an obvious, public way, steering the school's community through the emotionally-charged processes of grieving and making meaning of the event (Macpherson and Vann, 1996).

The issue of how people, including headteachers, may use their belief systems (religious or nonreligious) to come to terms with the death of a significant person in their lives is complex and problematic. There is a growing body of evidence that 'religion helps people to cope with a variety of life circumstances in a variety of ways' (Stroebe, 2004, p.33). However, this does not mean that an unproblematic, causal role for religious belief in enabling people to adjust to bereavement can simply be assumed. Stroebe (2004) discusses the role of religious belief in shaping two significant meaning-making responses to bereavement. These are belief in an afterlife (BA) and continued attachment (CA). In a religious context, both might impact positively or negatively on reactions to bereavement. For example, religious belief may offer potential condolence, perhaps through:

...the knowledge that there will be union with the deceased in heaven (BA) or in the form of enabling prayer for the good of the deceased, which is one way of continuing attachment (CA) to the deceased. (Stroebe, 2004, p.26)

It is equally plausible that both could work negatively, for example if BA prevented remarriage or precluded new social interactions that could potentially increase wellbeing and adjustment. Similarly, CA could lead to dependency and yearning or pining for the deceased. Interestingly, Stroebe (2004) argues that continuous attachment may be represented in nonreligious ways:

It is possible and comparatively easy for some persons to go about the various manifestations of CA in a secular manner. Telling stories, revering, creating living memorials, enacting rituals, naming of children, keeping linking-objects, sensing the on-going presence, using as role model or for guidance, comparing beliefs and calling up wisdom, all these phenomena and manifestations of CA can be accomplished without the basis of a religious belief system. (Stroebe, 2004, p.27)

Of course, different individuals react to traumatic or stressful experiences in different ways. Stroebe (2004) points out that securely attached individuals are able to stay emotionally close to others 'to be comfortable depending on them and being depended on by them' (p.27). So, it may be surmised that 'such people will be able to retain attachment to a deceased person and use a continued connection to the deceased to work towards acceptance of loss' (p.27). For insecure, emotionally dependent or anxious people, on the other hand, continuous association may be characterised by 'persistent yearning, longing and regret' (Stroebe, 2004, p.28). She concludes that continuous attachment 'may function in a detrimental manner for some people, irrespective of whether they are religious' (p.28).

Stroebe (2004) goes on to challenge the notion that methods of coping with bereavement based on religious belief can be distinguished legitimately from those with a secular grounding. She identifies three religious coping mechanisms. These are: using resources perceived to have been given by the divine; referring problems or difficulties to the divine and working with the divine in overcoming difficulties. Stroebe (2004) draws secular parallels, substituting a family member, or an 'other', for the divine. Of course, such equivalences and transferences are difficult and indicate the need for further investigation of the nature and function of those religious and nonreligious belief systems that school leaders may draw upon in dealing with trauma and distress.

2.3.10 Prayer as a source of support for headteachers

There is some evidence that religiously-based spiritual activity in the form of prayer may provide support in different ways for those who work in schools, for example, seeking confirmation and guidance from God in stressful times, so stiffening moral resolve and purpose. Prayer is a feature of Christian religious practice and relates, for the believer, to experiencing, enriching and developing a personal relationship with the divine (Cole, 1991). Fraser, (2007, p.32) defines personal prayer as 'time spent with God', offering 'the mental and spiritual space that is so hard to come by within the fraught culture of modernity'. It may involve thanksgiving, celebration, confession and petition - perhaps including a personal

search for guidance - as well as devotional meditation or contemplation. Prayer can conceivably take the form of work, for example for peace and justice; prayer and protest are closely linked in the Christian spiritual tradition (CTBI, 2008). Indeed, work may be seen, by some, as an 'individual liturgy' (Howse, 2008, p.23).

Prayer in the UK (Tearfund, 2007) a survey of national religious practices, including personal prayer, reports that almost half of the adults in the UK pray, forty-two per cent saying that they pray outside church/religious services, eighteen per cent praying each day. Perhaps not surprisingly, prayer is particularly important for regular church goers. Prayer itself is not defined in the report, except loosely and by implication as a time of personal stillness, intended to establish and nurture a connection with the divine: it 'provides an opportunity to enjoy a quiet time and to reflect' (Tearfund, 2007, p.8). The Tearfund study reports widespread perceptions of the calming effect of prayer; respondents indicated that they felt peaceful or contented (thirty-eight per cent) or strengthened (thirty per cent). The vast majority (eighty per cent) of those who pray reported that praying made them feel better; it provoked positive emotions in the person praying. The subjects of prayers were varied, but mainly included family and friends, thanking God and seeking guidance.

There have been few studies investigating teachers' or headteachers' prayer lives directly. A questionnaire-based study of the extent of any relationship between primary teachers' mental wellbeing and their spiritual activity, including personal prayer, drawing data from 311 participants, has been reported by Francis and Johnson (1999) and Fisher et al. (2002). Its findings suggest that 'greater frequencies of personal prayer and of church attendance are associated with lower psychoticism scores' (Fisher et al., 2002, p.9). Overall, there appears to be a positive relationship between prayer, church attendance and spiritual health. Personal prayer is a significant feature of a religiously-based spirituality and may be seen to have a positive effect on primary teachers' (and headteachers') wellbeing.

2.4 Spirituality and school leadership

This section provides an overview of indicative writing on spirituality and school leadership, in particular its conceptual problems and use of insights from the spiritual life in mainstream writing on headship.

2.4.1 Spirituality and leadership: direct and indirect associations

Characteristically, such writing is critical of contemporary school leadership development programmes and models of headship for their emphasis on function, task and behaviour and neglect of ethical, spiritual and moral conceptions of school leadership. For example, West-Burnham (1997) argues that one element of 'a holistic view of the nature of leadership' is that of 'spirituality' (p.235). He is hesitant in using the term and states - in the context of his

intentions - that 'this is an unsatisfactory word as it is not proposed to advocate a metaphysical or transcendental component *per se*' (p.239; author's italics). Rather, what he has in mind is a greater recognition by those concerned with leadership development that many headteachers bring 'higher order' (p.239) principled perspectives to their work; this is his spiritual element. Such principles may or may not be rooted in religious belief. They both sustain hope and underpin authenticity, as the school leader is required to embody them and include them in the leadership story or vision that he/she promotes within the school's community.

Such critiques, though, are not without their own problems. West-Burnham's writing (2002a) exemplifies many of the difficulties that beset such studies. In his discussion paper, *Leadership and Spirituality*, West-Burnham developed a tentative conceptual model of what spirituality in the context of school leadership may look like. The paper was provided as a 'pre-seminar thinkpiece' for school leaders attending a NCSL Leading Edge seminar. As such it could be expected to, and does, explore the potential contribution that personal spirituality may make to effective school leadership and school improvement. The Key Outcomes reported by the college on its website following the seminar locate spirituality 'within a model of personal effectiveness' and identify it as 'a fundamental component of personal capital' (NCSL, 2002) as well as noting West-Burnham's summarising remark that a school leader's capacity for spiritual growth should be developed because of its influence on leadership action and 'leadership behaviour is one of the most powerful determinants of how organisations develop'.

Writing which explores and provides a possible model of any interplay between school leadership and spirituality within the context of the NCSL's mandatory national headship and school leadership assessment and training provision is limited. Not surprisingly, therefore, West-Burnham's (2002a) thinkpiece is the only attempt by the NCSL to connect an inclusive conception of spirituality and school leadership cited by Woods (2007) in her study of headteachers' spiritual experiences and their influences on educational leadership. Given its provenance and ready online, national accessibility to both serving and aspirant primary heads, West-Burnham's conceptual model in spite of its provisional and tentative tone has significant potential influence. A further empirical study from the NCSL (Flintham, 2003a) utilising West-Burnham's defining metaphor for spirituality in its association with school leadership of a 'reservoir of hope' has been published and is also available online.

West-Burnham (2002a) argues that intangibility has led to the neglect of spirituality in the study of those factors that help to form, develop and sustain school leaders. For him, spirituality is a 'defining component of what it means to be human' (p.1) and it is in the 'essence of what it means to be a person that the foundations of leadership are to be found'. So spirituality is an essential component of 'an effective person' (p.1). West-Burnham (2002a)

goes on to argue that human capacities and potentialities are the outcomes of the interplay between three variables: 'emotional capacity; learning to create knowledge and the capacity to engage with the spiritual' (p.1). Spirituality balances and gives meaning to 'emotional intelligence, i.e. self-awareness and the ability to relate to others' (p.1) and 'the ability to learn and so to create personal knowledge and understanding' (p.1). This interplay develops 'personal capital' (p.2); these three elements acting symbiotically. In addition, spirituality provides 'the moral basis for human relationships and many of its most important expressions are found in human interaction' (p.2). So he argues that any contemporary model of school leadership would be enhanced by an understanding of this complex relational interplay.

West-Burnham (2002a) is aware of the difficulties surrounding any attempt to define spirituality arising from his analysis, but offers the following:

Spirituality is a journey to find a sustainable, authentic and profound understanding of the existential self which informs personal and social action. (p.2)

This he reduces to a 'more direct definition' (p.2): 'Spirituality is the reservoir of hope'.

So spirituality is essentially that which enables people to continue in the face of adversity, to continue in the face of the relentless demands of headship. As such, it represents the search for self, truth, social justice and community:

the search for self is about 'confidence of purpose, a clear sense of vocation and clarity of priorities, values and recognition of self-worth' (p.2);

the search for truth, for school leaders, is about 'questions to do with the nature and purpose of education, seeking to understand the nature of learning and what constitutes the essential nature of childhood' and 'the search for transcendence in the creation of understanding which is over and above the routine, the banal, the instrumental and the reductionist' (p.2);

the search for social justice is about 'democracy, equity and, ultimately, the entitlement of all to be valued as individuals worthy of respect and dignity' (p.2); and

the search for community is 'deeply rooted in connectivity' (p.2) and is about the creation of a sense of trust, value and belonging in the community.

For West-Burnham (2002a) these lie at the heart of what he calls 'leadership vision or moral leadership' signified through personal characteristics and capabilities, for example 'a capacity for wonder' and 'a passion to explain and understand' (p.3).

Such 'spirituality for headship' (p.3) is to be developed through: allocation of space and time for personal reflection; a structured approach to such reflections (perhaps through meditation or yoga); creating time for and developing profound personal relationships; allowing time for creativity and openness to the possibility of transcendence and joy, perhaps through encounters with poetry, music or children's laughter.

In summary, his model has the following key features:

spirituality is located in a model of personal effectiveness; school leadership cannot be conceptualised without a model of 'the essential components of an effective person' (p.1). It helps to build the capacity to act and to sustain development;

as such, spirituality is located in a complex interplay between emotional capability, used interchangeably with 'emotional intelligence' (p.2), capability as a learner and moral action.

Such spirituality can be characterised as 'the reservoir of hope' (p.2). West-Burnham (2002a) elaborates:

Our day-to-day human interactions make demands on us – draw on our reserves of energy, patience, stamina, optimism, charity, caring and commitment. There are days which are so negative that they threaten to desiccate us, to turn us into husks. The spiritual dimension is the antidote to this – the reservoir of hope is what enables people to continue in the face of adversity – it is particularly important for leaders to replenish their reservoir – if hope runs dry then commitment is lost. (p.2)

So, spirituality in its association with school leadership is to do with the creation, sustenance and development of a personal 'reservoir of hope' by making time and space for reflection and transcendence; undertaking creative activities; promoting social justice; self-renewal and awareness of the 'spirituality in relationships' through concern for the dignity of all members of the schools community.

West-Burnham's (2002a) conceptualisation of spirituality as a source of personal transformation and sustenance, of authenticity, of meaning and purpose in work that is deeply rooted in relationships is a helpful one and resonates with the exploration of the concept given in the first section of this review. However, his model has some tensions. The separation of spirituality from religion that admits the notion of secular spirituality to the discourse of educational leadership is perhaps more contested than he acknowledges, though it is this problematic decoupling that permits the application of the term to the lives of those headteachers who do not subscribe to a religious tradition. Spirituality appears to be cast as entirely benevolent, necessary to sustain headship in troubled times (see also West Burnham, 2002b). Any reading of spiritual activity as a source of inner turmoil or conflict or as a

response to dark, troublesome life episodes seems more limited. In fact, a heightened spiritual consciousness may lead to deep personal pain as the realities and difficulties of life are grappled with and resolution sought.

The commodification of spirituality, arguably made possible by its postmodern construction, is reflected in much of the current writing on school leadership and spirituality. Spirituality is assumed to be wholly benevolent, its positive effect largely unquestioned. It is to be used for individual wellbeing, self-empowerment and better personal relationships (Taylor, 2005) or cast as a:

...kind of psychological virtuosity enabling one to negotiate the whole gamut of experiences, adroitly avoiding or transmuting negative ones, while maintaining a harmonious and mobile sense of balance. (Dunne, 2003, p.104)

A spirituality that at once absorbs and sustains uncertainty is always going to be messy and hard to control and seems difficult to reconcile with rationalist, technical models of school leadership that appear to ignore or fear institutional complexity or want to manage it away. West-Burnham's (2002a) version of spirituality could be interpreted in this largely benign way. Perhaps, ironically, the spirituality that he argues is required to complement a mechanistic view of headship appears itself to have acquired a role that is mainly functional: a capacity for self-renewal to make headship sustainable. Moreover, in his view, this ability is one of the key factors in the effectiveness of school leaders and so linked to the contemporary performance agenda (West-Burnham, 2002a).

2.4.2 Spirituality and effectiveness

More recently, West-Burnham (2009) has argued for a greater emphasis on personal growth in the preparation of school leaders now 'marginalised by the technical/rational needs of headship and school leadership' (p.36). He roots such growth in personal understanding, in particular in the enrichment of what he calls 'the inner life' (p.36). A key area of the 'inner life' is 'the spiritual dimension' which is to do with 'the cultivation of higher order human characteristics' (p.38), such as capacities to love, care and show pity, as well as respond to the numinous in art and the natural world. The spiritual dimension, in his view, is expressed through the moral dimension of school leaders' actions, founded on secure and considered beliefs. For him, such moral purpose is, in turn, associated with outstanding school leadership. Day and Schmidt (2007) also note that successful school leaders look 'inwardly as well as outwardly' (p.67). This inner perspective is important for West-Burnham (2009), because it is closely related to strength of moral purpose, itself a source of resilience and courage.

Day et al. (2000) conducted a multiple-perspective interview-based study of twelve primary and secondary phase headteachers identified as 'effective' on the basis of OfSTED's reports, national assessment results and peer recognition. The authors report that the vision and practice of these heads were:

...organised around a number of core personal values concerning the modelling and promotion of respect (for individuals), fairness and equality, caring for the wellbeing of and whole development of students and staff, integrity and honesty. These core values were part of strong humanitarian or religious ethics which linked their personal and professional selves. (Day et al., 2000, p.39)

The leadership values espoused by the heads were primarily moral, that is dedicated to the wellbeing and development of the school's community, rather than instrumental (Day et al., 2000):

What is delivered must be good enough for my own children; people are important...respect their views, opinions, feelings and values...make sure that every child gets a fair chance...be true to one's self... (primary headteacher, Day et al., 2000, p.40)

The heads' values and visions both 'constructed their relationships with staff and students and were constructed by them' (Day et al., 2000, p.40). These values shape action and may be based on religious beliefs:

I live by my Christian beliefs and try to run this school by Christian values. I love the pupils, and teachers and this community. That is what I live out and that is what this school represents for me, a loving community of people. I care deeply about the children and the staff and I try to show this in everything I do. (infant headteacher in Day et al., 2000, p.40)

This narrative appears to identify what may be termed 'primary' and 'secondary' callings (Hartnett and Kline, 2005, p.10). For Christian believers such as this head, the notion of a primary calling refers to the call first and foremost to be 'in communion with God' (p.11). Complementary to the primary calling are, potentially, a number of secondary callings, which for this head led to headship. A secondary calling is not insignificant or unimportant, since, for committed Christians, it is both a means of serving God and of making the best use of gifts and talents given by God.

The NCSL (2007) study goes on to identify 'individual personal philosophies' (p.69) as enabling heads to sustain their wellbeing and work-life balance. Half of the participants (fifty per cent) suggested that these 'philosophies' do just that. However, confusingly, the diverse concepts of training in stress management and mental attitude (undefined) are grouped with religious belief under this heading. The same study reports remarks from two headteachers:

As a practising Christian, one participant felt that it was his strong faith that sustained him in difficult times. Another Christian participant stated that her headship is based on vocation and mission, rather than simply being a job. This was an important source of sustenance for her in the early days of her headship, about which she said:

...faith is number one, even above ...family because I know that I am here for a purpose. And my first three years here were an absolute nightmare. There were incredible difficulties. I had really difficult staff and there were times when I'd go home and cry and think, 'Why am I doing this job?' But I knew in my heart that it was where God wanted me to be and carried on. (NCSL, 2007, p.69)

Each of these headteachers is drawing on what may be seen as religiously-based spiritual resources for sustenance.

Flintham (2003a) in a Practitioner Enquiry undertaken for the NCSL investigated how headteachers' spiritual and moral leadership of their schools could sustain and renew them and their schools in demanding times. The study is based on data drawn from a one hour interview with each of twenty-five headteachers from across the primary and secondary age phases, including eight Christian faith-based schools. It utilised the metaphor of a 'reservoir of hope' drawn from West-Burnham (2002a) heuristically, to prompt headteachers' responses. Flintham (2003a) stressed from the outset that his concept of spirituality was an inclusive one, that it did not have 'exclusively religious connotations or linkage to a specific set of beliefs' (p.3) to avoid any restrictions on discussions. He reports that, 'all the headteachers interviewed indicated that they had a strong moral or spiritual underpinning to their work, if not a specifically religious one' (p.8) and concludes that the heads used a range of 'sustainability strategies' (p.6) to replenish the 'reservoir of hope' including 'belief networks'. He goes on to recommend that headship training programmes allow greater opportunities for reflection on values and vision. Flintham (2003b), in a further study that included disaffected heads, confirmed the importance of strategic, supported opportunities of this kind to enable heads to cope with critical, stressful incidents.

Woods (2007) investigated the place of headteachers' spiritual experiences as an internal resource, intending to extend the evidence base relating to 'the significance and influence of spiritual experience for educational leadership in schools' (p.135). Data were gathered by questionnaire (244 returns) from primary, middle and secondary phase headteachers across three local authority areas and seven interviews with individual headteachers. She reports, not surprisingly, that spiritual experiences (not necessarily related to religious conviction) are widespread amongst heads, though they vary 'in intensity and frequency' (p.151). She notes that heads' spiritual experiences impact positively on their work in schools, for example 'underpinning a sensitivity to the higher needs and the wellbeing of others' (p.149) and concludes that the effects such of spiritual experiences on leadership practice should inform school leadership theory and professional development.

A number of studies have touched upon issues relating to personal and professional spirituality in their findings, but not pursued them. Insights into headteachers' personal and professional spirituality have often emerged as by-products of studies focussed on leaders' effectiveness or responses to recent educational reforms. For example, Day et al. (2001) following their study of effective school leaders, emphasise the importance of 'personhood' (p.43) or 'the personal in the professional' (p.43) in any holistic view of leadership. They note that an ethical focus on 'morality, emotion and social bonds' (p.52) evidenced through actions informed by respect, trust and care seemed to stimulate and motivate effective leaders rather more than extrinsic concerns. Moreover, adherence to what some would see as these spiritual values seemed to lie at the heart of their mediation of often conflicting and contradictory demands.

2.5 Summary

The review of literature has provided a number of insights into the contested nature of spirituality and understandings of the term in its association with leadership. These are that:

the idea of transcendence is significant in thinking about spirituality, particularly its construction as a sense of a higher level of interconnectedness, perhaps, for believers, with the divine or awareness of the sacred. However, immanence is also an important part of the spiritual, suggesting that mundane interactions with the world of school and its experiences may provide additional insights into any spiritual dimension in heads' lives;

spirituality is generally (but not universally) accepted in its religiously-based and non religiously-based contexts; this inclusive conception allows investigation of the spiritual in the lives of school leaders who are not committed to a religious tradition. Such a reading opens the way to include attitudes, demeanours and dispositions – the way that headship is conducted – within any spiritual dimension;

spirituality is intertwined with authenticity, rooted in integrity and self-knowledge. So writing on spirituality in its association with leadership is concerned with principles that inform action. Spirituality is perceived as a source of personal transformation and sustenance, providing meaning and purpose to leaders' work;

spirituality is associated with relationships, rooted in connectivity and altruism;

the ambiguous nature of the concept and its postmodern constructions have led (for some) to its 'branding' and commodification. In its association with leadership, some

argue that it has become little more than code for a benign personal management tool and that its potential to disturb has been neglected; and

an important link between the emotions of leaders, their emotional labour and what may be regarded as their spiritual activities has emerged from the review. The nature and extent of any association is investigated further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Hints and glimpses of what some may call the spiritual in the mainstream of current writing on school leadership can be found, but are rarely explored in depth, perhaps reflecting the inherent difficulties of the concept. However, this lack of insights from the spiritual life inhibits understanding of heads' lives and work, particularly their emotional dimension. Writing focussed more directly on spirituality and school leadership is growing, but remains limited. More empirical studies are needed, especially those that are biographically-based so that spirituality in the context of school leaders' professional and personal lives may be understood more comprehensively. After all, it is difficult to understand the spiritual dimension in heads' lives or the ways in which it may form their practice and be expressed through it without a biographical context. The concept itself is connected with ways of being and 'with what we are' (Priestley, 2005, p. 211) so its investigation must inevitably include biography.

This research study is intended to contribute to the emerging, though still restricted, understanding of spirituality in its association with primary school leadership. The research questions that provide the focus for the study are given in Chapter 1 (1.3). The first question is designed to permit an open, tentative exploration of the spiritual dimension and reflect the problematic, slippery nature of the term, evident from the review of literature. The use of heads' 'personal and professional lives' within this question is intended to establish the degree of 'conceptual control' (Priestley, 2005, p.211) needed for the research to progress while recognising the holistic nature of spirituality and with it the need to respect headteachers as 'whole beings' (Priestley, 2005, p.212). One of the key issues for the research study is the extent to which the spiritual dimension may be found in the complex interplay between the two within this wholeness. In this way, the second question is linked to the first and intended to permit exploration of any connection between the heads' expressions of their own spirituality and their conduct of headship. Arguably, spirituality has simply to be accepted on its own terms as the 'unencompassable' (Scott, 2001, p.119) part of human experience. Such fluidity and elusiveness, while offering positive opportunities for adding new, rich understandings of spirituality in its association with primary school headship, had significant implications for the form of research enquiry used. These issues are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Methodology and data-gathering procedures used in the research study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the research purposes of the study and provides the rationale for the methodological approach and data-gathering procedures adopted. It outlines:

the potential place of spirituality in conceptualisations of educational leadership (Section 3.2);

the difficulties inherent in researching the spiritual dimension in primary headteachers' personal and professional lives (Section 3.3);

the methodology and data-gathering procedures used in the research study (Section 3.4);

a pilot study designed to trial those research procedures (Section 3.5);

the evaluation of that pilot and the responses made to it (Section 3.6);

the identification and recruitment of headteacher participants (Section 3.7); and

the data-gathering procedures used in the final research study; analytical comment on their implementation drawn from a reflective journal and field notes; the problems of validity inherent in the research study and their resolution (Section 3.8).

The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the data-gathering procedures used in the final research study together with analysis of the significant ethical and emotional issues that arose during the research activities and the responses made to them (Sections 3.9 and 3.10).

3.2 The potential place of spirituality in contemporary conceptualisations of educational leadership

The research study is intended to contribute to current conceptualisations of school leadership and the research base that both supports and forms them. In particular, it aims to contribute to an integrated and comprehensive approach to understanding primary headship

that acknowledges each headteacher as a 'unique and complex case' (Elliott, 2005, p.118), a dimension of this complexity being spiritual beliefs, activities and practices. In addition, the study may usefully shed light upon the issue of whether the extent to which models of school leadership already treat religious or humanitarian promptings in headteachers' lives is sufficient to capture a spiritual dimension.

In recent decades, transformational theory, developed from the work of Burns (1978), has had a particular popularity as a way of conceptualising school leadership, at least in academic circles (Southworth, 1999) and the place of spirituality within it has received some attention. For example, Woods (2007), following her study of headteachers' spiritual experiences, argues that the spiritual life has to be part of the theory of school leadership and understandably, given the prominence of transformational theory, uses its key idea of distributed leadership to show how spirituality may be located within it. Bottery (2004) argues that the popularity of the concept can be attributed to the current climate of unremitting change in both education and business. For him, transformational leadership, with its emphasis on emotions and values, trust and loyalty, offers a means of coping that transactional leadership (with which it is usually contrasted), designed to deal with 'stable structures' and 'a predictable economic tomorrow' (p.16) cannot.

The theory suggests that school leaders use their power (leadership being a form of power) to work with others to transform those features of schooling that need to be improved. Dantley (2003) maintains that such leadership takes place when leaders and followers mutually and intentionally 'raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality' (p.3) and argues that if transformational leadership involves a reconstruction of people's perceptions of school realities (their meaning-making), then it is necessary to include spirituality in 'such a nuance of educational leadership' (p.6). This is because spiritual consciousness and heightened self-awareness have an important role in such meaning-making. There are dangers, of course, that the issues of *being* implicit in transformational theory are neglected and translated inappropriately into identifiable leadership skills and managerial strategies: that techniques may be emphasised at the expense of purposes. There are dangers, too, that transformational leadership may be used to inspire others to fulfil a vision that is pre-determined, precluding any notion of shared participation, or that personal inspiration and charisma may be used to gain commitment (Bottery, 2004). Nevertheless, as Bottery (2004) argues, the theory's distributive elements have ethical potential and at least open the door to understanding leadership as part of an interactive organisational process of communal meaning-making.

So, it is possible to identify a spiritual dimension in transformational leadership theory, though this seems, at present, largely implicit. The theory itself has a base in leaders' values and beliefs, in making meaning within communities and in issues of being and becoming, all of

which arguably contribute to what may be termed a spiritual dimension and have a place in enriching other conceptions of leadership. The transformational model seems to underpin current writing on moral leadership (for example, Fullan, 2003; West-Burnham, 2006), which has an explicit emphasis on values which themselves 'may be spiritual' (Bush and Glover, 2003, p.17).

It is intended that the study's findings may also be used to stimulate reflection and debate on leadership theory more generally. The discourse of spirituality, by its nature, may provide a counter to more techno-rationalistic conceptions of headship. Therefore, the research questions which give focus to the study are:

1. What is the nature of the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers?
2. Is there a discernible connection between such a spiritual dimension and headteachers' work in primary schools?

A preliminary exploration of the concept of spirituality itself was necessary to enable the research study to progress and is reported in Chapter 2.

3.3 Difficulties inherent in researching the spiritual dimension in primary headteachers' personal and professional lives

As a research topic, an exploration of the nature and extent of a spiritual dimension in professional and personal life experiences presented particular difficulties and raised 'methodological tensions' (Moore in Goodley et al., 2004, p.63). The elusive nature of spirituality itself seemed only to confuse any understanding of how the research study could be undertaken. I began by forming tentative assumptions drawn from the review of literature (Chapter 2) that could, potentially, access the 'worlds of meaning' (Yob, 2003, p.112) associated with the term and revisited them during the course of the study. Such assumptions, inevitably, risked narrowing readings of the concept and so limiting possibilities for exploration. For this reason, an evaluation of the usefulness of these assumptions was included in my self-debriefing sessions (Wengraf, 2001) and recorded in my reflective journal after each round of introductory visits, interviews and field visits. For example, my notes following my initial visit to St Jude's record a conversation with Rory in which we discussed the possibility of a spiritual dimension in headship in general terms, but left the concept itself undefined. Rory talked about the stresses and tensions of dealing with difficult personnel issues and, as he saw it, the caring 'makeup' of those who enter teaching, that could prove to be a handicap in headship at such times. My notes (27th June, 2006) read:

Is Rory equating spirituality with care? Does care have to be 'soft'? Does this raise issue of spirituality as gentling? Perhaps though, there is a deeper issue – could it be that spirituality in the sense of giving and letting go of self, opens up those of a deep spirituality to disappointment, conflict. I had seen spirituality as a force of dissent, a vital bulwark against performativity and marketisation. Perhaps it heightens tensions, causes deep inner distress without necessarily leading to open contestation or dissent...

Why can't a deep spirituality act as a support and anchor in troubled times?

Perhaps a deep reflective outlook, setting high ideals founded on the gospel inevitably leads to disappointment of a deep and hurtful kind...

...Sometimes, after the immediate hurt, we are changed, see things in a different way are the better for it – so spirituality is evolving, changing, responsive, mysterious – we do not see the world in the same way. Maybe the stage to losing self (spiritual maturity) requires a deep self-awareness first of all, part of which is knowing one's capacities and capabilities for love, joy, coping with disappointments and so on.

Grappling with these conceptual difficulties shaped the design of the study. Controversially (Thatcher, 1999), I separated spirituality from religion and assumed 'that all humans are spiritual' and that the spiritual influences in their lives 'may or may not be mediated by religious doctrines or institutional frames' (Scott, 2001, p.119). It became clear that it would be through constructing a range of biographical case studies, drawn mainly from headteachers' personal, subjective accounts of their life experiences, that an understanding of the complexity of a spiritual dimension refracted through them could be captured. The uncertain, contradictory images that may be revealed through such biographical case studies aligned with the ambiguous nature of spirituality itself and the opportunities afforded by postmodernism for conceptualising the concept in its association with primary headship in varied and flexible ways (Scott, 2001). In this way, the research study differs from those biographically-based studies of headteachers that are intended to 'facilitate theorising about leadership' (Ribbins, 2003, p.59) and may be concerned with the development of career paths or leadership attributes (see, for example, Pascal and Ribbins, 1998; Dimmock and O' Donaghue, 1997) but less directly with what may be seen as spiritual promptings in headteachers' lives.

To add to these difficulties, there is some evidence that an ill-judged introduction of the term 'spirituality' into research activities could induce confused or even negative responses from potential headteacher participants (Flintham, 2003a), a function of the ambiguities surrounding the term and what some may perceive to be its association with sensitive, private matters of religious practice and belief. It could be argued that the prevailing societal context itself, both in and out of school, makes listening to and talking about the spiritual difficult anyway (Hay in Hay with Nye, 2006).

3.3.1 Values and assumptions

My own dispositions and their potential impact on the research process required careful consideration. Sikes and Goodson (2003) argue that the person of the researcher is always present in the research process:

This is because, as people, as social beings, located in space, time, cultural milieu, researchers (like anyone else) have been influenced by the particular understandings about, and interpretations of, the world to which they have been exposed. (p.34)

My life experience and professional familiarity as a primary headteacher, outlined in Chapter 1, is with a spirituality which is rooted in the Catholic Christian tradition; that is, with a conception of spirituality that however minimally, requires and draws upon a favourable personal disposition towards religion, if not a commitment to belief and practice. I was conscious throughout the pilot study and the final study that this was the case. Before beginning teaching in higher education, I had been head of two Catholic primary schools and later an OfSTED inspector and NPQH tutor, so I also carried the marks of headship, inspection and headteacher training. Therefore, it could be argued that, in Nesbitt's (2001a, p.153) terms, I was an 'insider' in Catholic schools, but an 'outsider' to a greater or lesser extent in others. Of course, being an 'insider' is not necessarily advantageous. It can raise confusing questions of identity and belonging, particularly where the 'insider's' worldview has changed and may conflict with those on the inside (Nesbitt, 2002). These tensions required me to deconstruct my preconceptions and engage in what Nesbitt (2004), writing in the context of an ethnographic study of religious communities, calls 'reflexivity', meaning 'probing reflection on the extent to which one is an insider or an outsider to the community which one is observing' (p.6).

Delamont (2002) warns: 'The problem of over-familiarity is a central one in qualitative research' (p.46). The pilot study described below was conducted in a community school and the head was not disposed to religious belief or observance of any kind and so it afforded a less familiar research context. However, the problem of over-familiarity was ever-present in the final research study, particularly in the Catholic setting of St Jude's, where it was difficult to set aside my earlier experiences as a teacher and headteacher and my assumptions about what was going on, particularly in the school's acts of collective worship. Nesbitt (2001b) grappled with a similar dilemma as Quaker researcher in conducting her enquiry into religious nurture and young peoples' spirituality, wondering if her involvement with the Society of Friends had strengthened her disposition towards particular participants' concerns and that her eventual analysis would simply reveal her faith commitment and dispositions. Like Nesbitt (2001b) all I could do was to be 'as transparent as possible' (p.139) about the nature of my own spiritual biography to allow it to be recognised.

3.4 Methodology and data-gathering procedures used in the research study

The methodology used in the research study was developed to reflect the intangible nature of the spiritual: data-gathering procedures and the nature of the data sought are closely linked (Elliott, 2005). According to Wellington (2000, p.15), one of the 'most common contrasts' made between research paradigms is that between positivistic and interpretive approaches. It implies opposing polarities, though the two approaches may be mixed or overlap in research practice and some alleged differences are contestable.

A positivistic approach seemed inappropriate for a study of a spiritual dimension in that it presupposes that the social world can be treated as an objective, rational reality and so tends to emphasise a search for knowledge that is itself considered to be 'objective, value-free, generalisable and replicable' (Wellington, 2000, p.15). Therefore, such an approach is usually associated with quantitative data-gathering procedures, such as surveys or questionnaires, that are concerned with providing an overall, summary description of 'the characteristics of a group or aggregation of people, rather than focussing on the unique qualities of each case in the sample' (Elliott, 2005, p.118), generating data that can be coded and presented numerically. An interpretive approach, on the other hand, sees reality as a 'human construct' (Wellington, 2000, p.16). So the researcher seeks to explore perceptions and meanings and to develop insights into contexts and events, for example in schools and classrooms.

This research study is concerned with primary headteachers' subjective perceptions of their personal and professional life experiences, the meanings they made from them and nature of a spiritual dimension could be discerned through them. So, it adopts a more interpretive approach using qualitative data-gathering procedures. Within the interpretive paradigm, a fully ethnographic approach had some limitations for a study of this kind. Ethnographic studies focus typically on aspects of cultural life in communities or organisations, for example, decision-making processes in primary schools. However, though the research data to be gathered necessitated investigation of social interactions, it was primarily concerned with the promptings informing heads' leadership work that are formed in and through individual life experiences, albeit contextualised within schools. Importantly, an ethnographic approach in itself did not appear to stress sufficiently the biographical perspective that was needed to investigate a spiritual dimension (Priestley, 2005). According to Goodson and Sikes (2001) ethnographic studies have focussed largely on people in particular situations (often against a backdrop of cultural, structural or systemic constraints) and how meaning is generated, generally collectively, in response to particular contexts and events, rather than 'biography and background' (p.14). For these reasons, a case study approach (each head being a particular case) was adopted, combining interviews, observations and scrutiny of documentation but with a general 'biographical attitude' (MacClure, 2001, p.169). This was

eventually refined to focus on the nature and extent of any spiritual promptings in the heads' lives and their perceived effects on professional practice.

3.4.1 A biographical case study approach

The biographical case study approach was employed because it necessitates the intensive 'holism' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.10) that Priestley (2005) argues is required in any conceptualisation of spirituality. Each study was intended to examine a particular headteacher, collecting biographical information, comments and reflections on experiences as well as insights into values, beliefs and relationships to provide holistic description and analysis. In-depth interviews were given prominence as a source of data because it was believed that the accounts that headteachers provided of their life experiences could give 'vital entry points' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.2) to a better understanding of those factors that sustain, encourage and disturb them in their work, including those that could be described as spiritual. In addition, to contextualise their narratives and shed further light on the spiritual dimension each head was observed in a variety of working situations and supplementary documentation was gathered.

3.4.2 Limitations of the biographical case study approach

The research approach adopted has significant inherent difficulties. It could be argued that the biographical approach does not explore the situation of the heads in any depth so organisational factors that may help to form heads' perceptions and actions are not addressed in detail. Of course, general conclusions cannot be drawn from biographical case studies of this kind: the research study seeks rather to enrich, explain and add to current understandings of primary school leadership.

It could also be argued that biographical interview data is likely to be partial and selective: that it simply provides an opportunity for the heads to present themselves in the best light. Inevitably, in providing biographical narratives, the heads are interpreting the world 'from their own various perspectives' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.39). Narratives depend on the 'perspective, values and motivations' (Sikes and Everington, 2001, p.14) of those providing them: interpretations, too, may change as details are remembered or forgotten. This raises important epistemological matters relating to what knowledge is considered to be and its relationship to the methodology adopted for the study. Sikes and Everington (2001, p.15) advise:

Rather than attempting to make unrealistic claims for representing 'reality', life historians should simply acknowledge what they are able to do with the stories they use as data.

Therefore, Sikes (2000, p.259) argues that purpose of such biographical research is to present a 'genuine subjectively perceived reality' and so the presentation of biographically-based studies requires researchers to be 'explicitly tentative' about any claims to 'truth' or 'reality' and this is the position adopted for the research study.

Ethical matters and the particular emotional demands made in research of this kind can be disruptive and challenging. These issues are discussed in more detail below and contextualised in the account of the research process as it unfolded.

3.5 Pilot study

A pilot study was undertaken with one headteacher (Pat) of a community primary school, designed to trial the protocols and procedures to be used for collecting data in the final research study.

3.5.1 Pilot study interviews

Data were gathered primarily through a cumulative series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews with Pat, supplemented through non-participant observations of her everyday activities in schools and scrutiny of selected documentation. The decision to use the three-stage procedure for collecting interview data was influenced in part by Dimmock and O'Donaghue's (1997) contention, citing Woods (1992), that as the depth and range of participants' recall and perceptions of their life experiences were unknown, their accounts should be built up over a period of time. In addition, Elliott (2005) argues that a series of interviews enables researchers to develop a positive relationship with participants as well as building their confidence in relating their experiences.

The flexible structure of the interviews, framed around key questions, reflected the fluidity and ambiguity of the data to be collected. It was impossible to know beforehand which experiences would be reported by the headteachers or to identify those that could offer insights into promptings or responses that may be said to be spiritual. A more rigid structure may have meant that important experiences were ignored or misleading emphasis given to particular events or episodes (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). In the final research study, the degree of structure given to the interviews also was a function of the number of participants involved: a compromise between encouraging full, considered accounts of their experiences and the time available for the study from the headteachers (Wengraf, 2001).

In the first two pilot interviews Pat was invited to talk about and reflect upon her professional and personal lives and significant influences, events and episodes in them. The first interview explored Pat's recent experiences as a head and the context of her school. The second

focussed on key events in her career, her background before teaching, her formative influences, her values, beliefs and what might be described as her spiritual awareness. The third interview was less structured, intended to draw emerging issues together, clarify outstanding matters and provide some tentative feedback to Pat on a spiritual dimension in her professional and personal lives as it had emerged from the data. In response to my evaluation of the pilot as it unfolded, particularly Pat's hesitancy in discussing what may have been seen as her spiritual promptings, this interview was reconfigured to allow further opportunity to discuss the spiritual in Pat's life experiences more directly.

The first two pilot interviews were arranged sequentially, but not chronologically. In this way the sequence reordered one of the usual features of research based on biographical narrative; its chronological sequencing of events (Elliott, 2005). Dimmock and O'Donaghue (1997) citing Langness and Frank (1981), argue that this ordering facilitates the development of the necessary degree of rapport, intimacy and knowledge of context for successful biographically-based research.

3.5.2 Pilot study observations

The pilot included three separate periods of observation of Pat at work in a variety of settings across the school, including general class visits, an act of collective worship, office-based work and various meetings. Understandably, I was not able to witness sensitive, confidential meetings or conversations at first hand, for example relating to the implementation of child protection issues. Observations were intended to ground discussions of Pat's life experiences in mutually shared events during interviews and to elaborate her accounts through scrutiny of her working context.

The observations did not follow a predetermined schedule. In negotiating access, I had indicated to her that I was seeking to set her work in context, in particular anything that might be said to contribute to my understanding of a spiritual dimension in her everyday work: anything that, perhaps, might be regarded as leaving some kind of spiritual mark on those present during periods of observation. In the event, this left me feeling unsure of how to set about the task. At first, I noted Pat's actions, conversations and general 'busyness', particularly anything that might be said to have a spiritual dimension, for example sharing a story about persistence and courage with the school's community in an act of collective worship. These initial notes rapidly assumed the form of an itemised time diary, perhaps due to my own background in assessing and tutoring school leaders in a performance and standards-driven environment, and lacked an important qualitative dimension. Gradually, as the process developed, I included notes of Pat's body language and perceived reactions to encounters with her by others. I became much more aware of the significance of her 'performance' in relational actions, such as the positive nature of chance encounters with

pupils around the school, though it was not until the final (third) period of observation that I became fully attuned to these events: a process of gradual enculturation similar to that reported by Jackson et al. (1993) in their study of the moral life of schools. These experiences and understandings informed observational activities and their recording in the final research study.

3.6 Evaluation of the pilot study: issues arising and their influences on the methodology and data-gathering procedures used in the final study

The pilot interview sequence produced data that offered many useful biographical insights, but not the potential for understanding the relationship between different events and episodes, Pat's responses to them and any reflection on them that could illuminate spiritual promptings in her accounts. Pat was both reticent and uncertain in discussing how she coped with the demands of her job, particularly in articulating what may be regarded as a spiritual dimension in her experiences, however inclusively that was described. This was not surprising, given the elusive nature of the concept and a general culture, including that of school leadership, in which the language of the spirit has been neglected and talking about it is difficult, sometimes confused with discourse on sensitive matters of personal religious belief and practice (Flintham, 2003a; Hay with Nye, 2006). The intensive and extensive nature of contemporary headship anyway, may simply inhibit the space and time available for deep or meaningful reflection on life experiences. Pat described her work as 'constant' and my pilot field notes recorded her round of persistent, varied, demanding activities.

My own reflections at the time of the pilot raised a number of issues, not least the proposition that a headteacher's spirituality could exist intuitively, evidenced in demeanour and attitude (the way in which headship was conducted), but not be articulated. This problem of discerning spirituality through language is discussed below.

Pat was known to me through various professional networks before the research study began. This familiarity eased access and it was in this context that she offered to help in the pilot study. However, Birbili (1999) warns of the disadvantages of working with participants who may already have such a connection with the researcher. For example, it could mean that relational boundaries are blurred and possibly affect research practices, for example, by inhibiting discussion of potentially sensitive matters. After all, once the pilot was concluded, we were still very likely to encounter each other through common professional networks. It could be argued that relational distance is necessary in research of this kind, particularly for satisfactory closure. Goodson and Sikes (2001) caution:

Doing research 'in your own backyard' can have unintended consequences with implications going far beyond the data that are collected. For all sorts of reasons,

informants may be cautious about what they reveal, and this will be especially so when they are already in some sort of personal relationship with the enquirer. (p.25)

This is not to suggest that Pat attempted to mislead or deceive. Simply, it is important to recognise the range of factors such as faded memory or a desire to please that can impact on research of this kind. Sikes (2000, p.262) notes that an opportunity to tell part of one's personal story is 'an opportunity to construct identity'. So it is natural that participants will be eager to present themselves in a favourable light. This may involve 'missing bits out or putting a positive 'spin' on some aspects through a choice of particular words and phrases'. Of course, headteachers like Pat, owing to the nature of the job, are likely to be particularly confident, adept and experienced in self-presentation.

The issue of familiarity and closeness to the participants and its potential to limit responses was mitigated by the circumstances surrounding the development of the final research study. I had retired from my post as a lecturer in primary education in 2006 as the field work for the research study began. In the preceding few years, I had gradually discontinued my activities as a tutor for the NPQH programme and as an OfSTED inspector. So, though I had known most of the headteachers personally before the research study began, mainly through professional training networks of various kinds, I was unlikely to encounter him/her again during or after the duration of the study in any formal or informal context.

There is some evidence that in some circumstances talking to a stranger about sensitive personal matters is easier than talking to someone closer. For example, William Wentink, a Catholic priest, writing of his experiences in responding to the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Centre buildings recalls:

Many times I would hear confessions of the emergency workers in the areas by the morgue, Ground Zero, and Staten Island landfill. When they knew I came from a long distance and would probably never see them again, they felt very comfortable opening up. (USCCB, 2006, p.17)

Similarly, Sikes (2000) reports an embarrassing encounter with a previous life history informant which raised difficult ethical questions about her own personal and professional responsibilities and the ways in which different roles in research activities can overlap awkwardly. As the project began, I carried no 'official' baggage of any kind and had become, in this sense, a professional 'stranger', situated outside the headteachers' lives. So I had the advantages of both closeness and distance.

It may be legitimate to speculate that a male primary headteacher may have responded differently to me. In reality, this is to raise crucial questions of whether gender matters in such research situations. What seems more important is that the type and purpose of research relationships expected are known and overt (Goodson and Sikes, 2001). Any reciprocity

established during the final research study appeared to lie in my credentials as a former head and inspector and a shared understanding of the context of the headteachers' work.

During the pilot, all interviews were recorded as unobtrusively as possible with Pat's permission, enabling me to give my full attention to her (Scott and Usher, 1999). I also made, brief personal notes (usually a few words or lines) to supplement and complement recording during each session, but elaborated and reflected on them following each interview (Delamont, 2002). Reading over these notes and scrutinising summary transcriptions allowed me to identify issues for possible clarification or elaboration in subsequent interviews. This recording procedure was employed during the interview sequence of the final study. The observational contexts for both the pilot and final studies prohibited the use of video or audio recording. From time to time immediate note-taking opportunities were also inhibited, for example as I took part in a literary tea party with younger pupils at St. Mary's school during a field visit for the final study.

My evaluation of the pilot suggested that, if headteachers were to talk freely and reflect on the spiritual promptings that may be discerned in their life experiences, further support and scaffolding were needed. Accordingly, for the final study, I reconfigured the interviews into a more familiar chronological, cumulative narrative sequence through which I could construct tentative images of any spiritual promptings discernible in their experiences. It was intended that this emerging image would facilitate discussion of the spiritual dimension and perhaps encourage debate and argument in the third and final interview. In the revised interview sequence, the particular discourse of spirituality or emerging images of the spiritual in their narratives were not included until the third interview unless they were volunteered earlier by the headteachers. Instead, the focus of the first two interviews was on personal and professional biography, the history and context of critical events and episodes and sources of inspiration, motivation and sustenance at times of joy, crisis, conflict or pain, allowing clues to what may be described as a spiritual dimension to emerge through the headteachers' accounts of these experiences.

The third interview was reconceived entirely. In the pilot, it had served mainly as an opportunity to revisit and clarify outstanding issues from interviews one and two and to offer some feedback on preliminary findings for Pat's comments. To overcome potential reticence in the final research study, I considered incorporating opportunities for headteachers to respond to a selected metaphor within the interview sequence, perhaps in the way that Flinham (2003a) had used the image of 'a reservoir of hope' as a heuristic to encourage headteachers' discussion of moral and spiritual sustenance in themselves and their leadership of their schools. However, the usefulness of metaphor as a research tool seemed to depend on a complex, unpredictable reaction between the metaphor itself and the faith and experiential positions of those engaging with it (Halstead, 2005). To that extent, it could inhibit

investigation: metaphors can confuse and obscure as well as enlighten. So the third interview was redesigned to encourage scrutiny and debate of a tentative image of the spiritual influences that motivated and inspired each participant's work that had emerged during the first two interviews (Appendices 3 and 4).

During the pilot, a series of non-participant naturalistic observations was undertaken, encompassing most aspects of Pat's general life around the school. In the final research study, feasibility dictated that observations were more tightly focussed to include more formal, public events as well as activities around the school. Therefore, emphasis was placed on those aspects of each headteacher's work that were likely to involve interaction with members of the school's community, the relational, 'within group' aspects of each head's work, rather than more isolated office-based administrative work. This was important, given that the greater part of heads' professional work involves interactions with members of the school's community and the wider local community of various kinds. School leadership is primarily a relational phenomenon, residing in interpersonal networks (Donaldson, 2001). So, additional insights into working relationships developed from contextual observations were needed to balance the picture of the spiritual dimension emerging from interviews and documentation. Such an additional perspective was crucial as it is in relational demeanours that important nonverbal clues to spirituality may be found (Berryman, 2001). Arguably, spirituality itself is a relational concept (Hay with Nye, 2006).

I also gathered a range of documentation including, for example, Pat's long term development plan for her school to contextualise her work. In the final research study, to mitigate the demands on headteachers, I restricted the range of documentation sought to that which would help to extend my understanding of the context of the school and particular events discussed.

3.7 The participating headteachers: identification and consent

An initial list of potential primary headteacher participants was drawn up, largely on the basis of my previous encounters with most of them through a variety of professional networks. One was suggested to me as a likely participant by a former colleague. From this list, participants for the final research study were sought. They were identified initially on the basis of ease of access and the probability that they would talk 'honestly and non-manipulatively' (Wengraf, 2001, p.95) to me; a key feature of the study.

As a first step, I spoke with ten primary headteachers during the spring and summer terms of 2005 by telephone, explaining the nature of the research study and its aims in general terms. Given the ambiguous nature of the spiritual, it was difficult to provide a definitive explanation of the exact nature and intended outcomes of the study. Three did not wish to be included

from the outset. Depending on his/her initial expression of interest, a further visit to the headteacher's school was arranged so the study could be discussed in more detail and the headteacher's consent to taking part confirmed.

During this 'consent' visit, the headteachers were reminded of the purposes of the study and its methodology, including the intended focus of each of the three in-depth interviews, particularly my concern to uncover the extent and nature of any spiritual dimension in their life and work experiences. Deliberately, I made no attempt to define spirituality, talking only in broad, unelaborated terms of potential sources of sustenance, inspiration or motivation to avoid leading headteachers' interpretations of the concept by introducing what Wengraf (2001, p.189) calls a 'powerful prior frame'. I suggested possible benefits for the head personally, for example, opportunities for reflection and professional development (Woods, 1985). An ethical protocol relating to participants' anonymity, the protection of confidentiality and the headteacher's right of withdrawal was provided to each head.

Personal professional development was a powerful motivator for participation. Bernadette saw joining the study as a means of countering her professional isolation, itself a function of her school's remote rural location. During one subsequent research visit (Field note, 17th October, 2006), she confided that she regretted that she had not experienced professional mentoring of a deep kind that would have enabled her to explore her feelings, values, purposes and beliefs and saw the research study as an opportunity to do this.

During the consent visit, all but one of the headteachers offered a tour of the school, during which I made unstructured observations. I noted these initial observations immediately after the visit and used them to provide starting points for discussion or further exploration during the first interview.

Seven headteachers agreed to participate, but one withdrew as the study began, following an extended period of illness. The final sample was 'purposive' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.24) in that it was planned to include a variety of perspectives and experiences. Above all, it was essential that the heads were prepared to 'talk for extended periods' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.24). The headteachers led faith schools (Catholic and Church of England) and community schools (see Chapter 4). Their schools varied in situation and size: all were primary schools or primary schools with nurseries apart from St Mary's Church of England Infant and Nursery school. They served communities that were diverse in faith status and socioeconomic terms, ranging from urban and suburban to town and rural communities, but not in race or ethnicity. There were few pupils from ethnic minorities or faith traditions other than Christianity in their schools. The research study is therefore based largely on the personal accounts of six established primary headteachers interviewed between 2006 and 2007. The sample size was relatively small, partly for reasons of manageability, but mainly

because the nature of the research study itself and its intention to provide detailed insights into primary headteachers' experiences, rather than data to support 'objective, etic and nomothetic generalization' (Goodson and Sikes, 2001, p.22).

Each of the six headteachers had had considerable experience in schools. Three (Dave, Terry and Peter) had already been heads of other schools. All but Margaret were in what may be termed 'late career' and embryonic thoughts of retirement featured in a number of our interviews. Each headteacher had had, in spite of some difficulties, a successful career in schools, though Bernadette voiced some regrets that the demands of teaching and then headship had prevented her from developing what she considered to be other important aspects of her life.

It was accepted from the outset that the spiritual influences at work in participants' lives may be rooted in religious or nonreligious sources or a combination of both. Accordingly, headteachers who between them were likely to reflect this broad spectrum of influences - religious and secular - were included. Each headteacher's position in relation to personal religious belief and practice is a complex matter and any assumed correlation between school type and each headteacher's religious and spiritual disposition is misleading. For example, Terry was not a practising Christian, but insisted that his headship was informed by and imbued with a Christian ethic. Bernadette was a Catholic, but contested a more traditional understanding of the divinity of Christ, preferring instead to emphasise his humanity. So, for her, the fulfilment of the human potential of each member of her school's community was an important educational aim. Dave saw little place for organised religious practice in his own life, but imbued his school with a strong secular humanitarian ethic, which he described as 'Christian values' (interview 3). In the context of the sample, Dave represented an unusual or different case, seeing any religious influence in his own life and society at large as mainly negative and therefore seemed to offer, at least potentially, other possibilities in any discerned spiritual dimension.

The headteachers had had markedly different careers. For example, Rory had been headteacher of the same Catholic school for over twenty years. During that time, he had been seconded by his diocese to act as the headteacher of a nearby Catholic school that had had some difficulties, pending the appointment of a permanent head. Dave had taken up his first headship only after a lengthy period of doubt about his own abilities and in response to the urgings of his head at that time.

It could be argued that there is a potential for bias in such a sample in that it is weighted towards particular sorts of experience. But Goodson and Sikes (2001) argue that any verbal accounts of human experience are in essence, biased:

Everyone sees the world through frames of reference which are developed as a result of their possessing particular attributes, or being situated in particular social, historical, geographical, political, religious (or whatever) contexts which, consequently, lead to various and differing experiences. (p.25)

However, in the context of the research study, bias had a particular implication relating to verbalization. The procedures adopted carry with them the implication that the spiritual dimension may be discerned primarily through the spoken word, though the relationship between verbalization and personal spirituality is highly contested (Nesbitt, 2001a). Observations, formal and informal, provided important nonverbal clues to the heads' spirituality.

There was also a additional risk of my overvaluing religiously-based accounts of spiritual promptings, particularly when they were couched in a religious frame that was familiar to me, for example as Rory talked about the 'Four Last Things' (death, judgement, hell and heaven) in traditional Catholic teaching. The structure for analysis using different readings applied to each transcription, described below, was intended to ensure that any nonreligious promptings revealed were equally valued.

3.8 Final research study: methods and data-gathering procedures

For the final study, with some variation to accommodate inevitable constraints on the headteachers' time, school closures and other restrictions, three interviews were held with each of the six headteachers. Altogether, between June, 2006 and June 2007, I conducted eighteen face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview, observed eight acts of collective worship, one staff meeting, had five conducted tours and 'shadowed' each headteacher for a period of a half day of his/her choice. In addition I attended two Christmas productions and one school leavers' service.

3.8.1 Interviews

The three interview series used in the final study was designed sequentially and followed, loosely, that described by Seidman (1991). I used aide-memoires indicating broad key questions to structure interviews one and two. The aide-memoire for interview one, drawn loosely from that developed by Pascal and Ribbins (1998) in their study of school leadership careers, was used with each head in the first round of interviews. The second was more bespoke, responding to the issues and ideas emerging from the first. The third interview was only lightly structured and is described below. The headteachers were sent an outline of the aide-memoire that I planned to use to guide discussion approximately one week before each interview to give them time to consider the issues they were being asked to explore, particularly as they could be complex and sensitive (Dimmock and O'Donaghue, 1997). As

each interview built upon the previous one, the heads were able to reflect on earlier discussions and return to them to clarify or elaborate their responses (Scott and Usher, 1999). Sample interviews for each interview round are included in Appendices 1-3. The interview questions were primarily open-ended to encourage the heads to 'reflect very broadly on their experiences' (Nias, 1989, p.6). In practice, some questions were omitted or reordered as interviews developed, to adjust to the heads' narratives or to respond to particularly sensitive moments. Additional, supplementary questions were used to seek clarity or exemplification. Appropriate contextual information was collected through interviews as well as from observation and documents.

In the final research study the sequence of the interviews was reordered from that used in the pilot. That sequence had, in practice, simply prolonged discussion of biographical details, limiting deeper exploration of particular events and episodes and discussion of a potential spiritual dimension in Pat's accounts. I had some acquaintance with most of the headteachers and their schools before the final study began: all but one gave me an extensive 'tour' during my consent visit. The tour became a sort of informal 'interviewing on the hoof' (Knowles, 2006, p.396) revealing the headteachers' perceptions of the school's context, community and development. It also allowed us to share recollections of headship that seemed to provide the reciprocity necessary to underpin and justify a more familiar chronological ordering for the final interview sequence.

3.8.2 *The three-part interview structure*

Each interview was planned within a three-part sequence. Following Seidman (1991) the particular purpose of the first interview was to put the head's experiences in context. So, during the interview, the head was invited to talk about his or her life and career and to provide a context for the experiences described in subsequent interviews. Without such a grounding it was doubtful that the meaning of these experiences, or the sources of inspiration, motivation, sustenance and even disturbance that they identified could be properly understood (Woods, 1993).

The purpose of the second interview was to concentrate on the particular events or episodes that participants identified as demanding, distressing or uplifting. It sought especially to identify the nature of those fundamental human characteristics and capacities that may be called spiritual that the heads drew upon to cope with and respond to these events, for example hope or forgiveness (Halstead, 1997). The intention was to gather details of their experiences upon which my tentative image of spiritual promptings in their experiences and their commentary on it given in interview three could be built.

In the third interview, the headteachers were asked to reflect on the meaning of the experiences that they had recounted in particular, on any spiritual dimension in those experiences. Interview three had two separate, but related parts. In the first part, each headteacher was asked to reflect on what had been said in the first two interviews and to confirm, clarify or elaborate his/her responses to enhance our mutual understanding. In the second, each was encouraged to challenge and comment critically on my early, tentative interpretation of the spiritual promptings in their life experiences and their impact on their professional work as they had emerged from the accounts that they had given. The structure of that embryonic image was based on the range of common understandings of the term identified by Halstead and Taylor (2000) and Alexander and McLaughlin (2003). The image was intended to be used as a heuristic, to initiate focussed discussion and add to the developing conceptualisation of what the spirituality permeating their life experiences might look like. Therefore, individualised aide-memoires were prepared for interview three and a sample is included as Appendix 4.

Seidman (1991) argues that it is important to adhere to the three interview structure, to maintain focus and a sense of purpose through the data-gathering process. Each interview provided 'the foundation of detail for the next' (Seidman, 1991, p.13). In practice, the distinctive focus of interviews one and two in the study became, naturally and predictably, more blurred than he suggests; biographical details, significant events and reflections melding in the same interview. Where details of events and experiences, sometimes quite distressing, were disclosed unexpectedly, it was necessary for the purposes of the study to allow the heads to complete their responses. So, for example, when Dave described the traumatic effects of the sudden death of a pupil in interview one, I allowed him to continue without interruption. I did not, however, continue to explore the details of the event in depth, its impact on him, his personal and professional reactions to it and subsequent reflections until later in the interview sequence. An advantage of the sequential focus of the interview series was that it provided time and opportunity to consider how such sensitive events could be best revisited in later interviews.

Elliott (2005) reports that a number of researchers suggest that ninety minutes or so is the optimum length of a qualitative interview. If the interview is likely to need a longer time, it is recommended that a second or third interview is conducted. Seidman (1991) argues persuasively for this ninety minute optimum to allow sufficient time for the purposes of each interview to be realised, though this is not absolute: 'What is important is that the length of time be decided upon before the interview process begins' (p.14). Elliott (2005) confirms the importance of making timings clear to participants from the outset. I suggested to the headteachers that each interview may last up to an hour and a half. This gave them a sense of 'how much detail to provide' (Elliott, 2005, p.32) as well as enabling them to organise busy daily schedules. In the final project, the length of most interviews varied between fifty-five and

seventy-five minutes; a function of each headteacher's availability and the extent and nature of the responses that he/she gave. The first interview with Dave lasted for about ninety minutes.

The spacing of the interviews was determined by each headteacher's availability and by the need for me to have sufficient time to identify and mull over the key issues that had arisen and to prepare for each successive part of the sequence. The full sequence typically extended over three months or so. Interviews involving Terry, for example, began in late October 2006 and were completed in early January 2007. Contextual observations of various kinds were interspersed between interviews. Margaret, as head of small school with a considerable teaching commitment, had only restricted availability. Her planned interview schedule was severely disrupted by two inspections and other unexpected complications. In Margaret's case the sequence began in July, 2006 and was completed in January, 2007. However, the delay between episodes of data gathering meant that I could scrutinise and reflect upon preceding interviews and observations. This period of reflection was particularly important when matters of personal sensitivity had been raised and my decision to raise such issues in a subsequent interview raised ethical dilemmas that required prior resolution.

Whatever the spacing, the three-part structure was maintained. The recording of the first interview with Dave was of poor quality and a further recorded telephone interview (interview 3b) was conducted with him to clarify his narrative. The three interviews, in addition to the introductory meeting and contextual observations, usually preceded and followed by informal, often jovial, sometimes lengthy conversations provided the opportunity to develop a positive relationship with each headteacher over the period of the study.

The scheduling of the interviews and observations was designed to allow me to alternate between data gathering and preliminary analysis, so that issues from the first interview could inform the second and a tentative analysis of both could inform the third. In that sense, though each interview followed the same general framework of key questions, each gradually became a unique, more finely tailored event, reflecting the individual nature of the experiences discussed. For each head, I undertook an early, broad analysis and interpretation of data to feed from the first into subsequent interviews, adjusting the detail of the next interview in the light of what had been found.

All interviews took place in the headteacher's room in the school, with the exception of those involving Margaret. At the time of the research, Margaret had a heavy class teaching commitment and so interviews took place after all school activities such as staff briefing meetings had been completed, in the school's staff room. Scott and Usher (1999) point out that: 'the setting within which the interview takes place is a depository of available meanings from which the interviewee draws in giving their answers' (p. 109). Each setting held artefacts

from the head's life, sometimes provoking different memories for them, such as pupils' work, photographs of school events or sporting memorabilia.

3.8.3 Self-debriefing and reflective journal

Immediately following each interview and observation session, I undertook a 'self-debriefing' session (Wengraf, 2001, p.142), recording memories or additional enquiries that had been stimulated. This was particularly valuable (and necessary) following research activities where detailed note-taking or recording had not been possible, for example whilst sitting amongst parents and carers during a Christmas concert or amongst staff in assembly. But I also took the opportunity to revisit the data-gathering processes themselves, reviewing for example the usefulness of particular questions or the effects of ethical decisions, sometimes taken hurriedly in response to events as they unfolded. For example, my self-debriefing notes include an account of the installation of a memorial bench for a pupil in the grounds of Shore Close school during the afternoon of my visit (3rd July 2006). I wondered if I should ask Dave if I could attend its dedication and decided not to, concerned that this was an intrusion into his and his community's obvious grief. Burgess (1989) suggests that just such 'a review of ethical problems and dilemmas should be at the heart of reflexive practice' (p.74). The self-debriefing was usually done as I returned to my study, but occasionally before I left the school's premises.

The self-debriefing notes were recorded in a reflective journal. This helped me to reflect on each interview and observation and the circumstances that surrounded them and prepare new questions for subsequent visits. The journal allowed me to monitor how my questions may have led interviews in a particular direction. It also helped me to begin to build a tentative picture of spirituality as it could be discerned in school leadership. So, for example, I began to explore the connection between a spirituality of dissent and his professional responsibilities, care and commitment after an interview with Terry. My journal read (15th November 2006):

...spirituality of disturbance has different manifestations – an inner conflict which bristles at adopting a 'tough' leadership style and prefers to work through friendship, conciliation and support and an inner conflict caused by altruism, concern for children, deep love of the natural world that becomes so all consuming that personal relationships are neglected. Terry has begun to reflect deeply on the conflict, recognising the need for a deep sustaining relationship in his life, regretting his self-sacrificing altruism – he has tried to care about too many things.

3.8.4 Observations

Observations of key public events identified by the headteachers and of less structured, incidental occurrences were intended to illuminate and contextualise the experiences described in our interviews. They also offered glimpses into the headteacher's working life

that I could include in subsequent interviews to explore and reveal sources of renewal, deep reflection or personal spiritual life, including some that I had not expected. For example, Rory led a school assembly a few days before Armistice Day. As a part of the act of worship, focussed on remembrance and peace, he led the children, staff and school visitors in prayer. I asked afterwards whether it was possible for him to engage in personal prayer in such circumstances. As a head, I had found such moments to be overtaken and invaded by the busyness of the job. Rory assured me (interview 3) that, for him, it was possible and confided, somewhat hesitantly, that in those observed moments his thoughts and memories had been of his deceased wife.

The range of observations was designed to provide further clues to what may be described as the spiritual dimension in the heads' narratives. The range of possible sites for such clues was informed by those identified by Jackson et al. (1993, pp.4-43) in their study of moral education in schools. They were:

- formal events traditionally, though perhaps mistakenly, recognised as key sites for headteachers' spiritual leadership, especially the act of collective worship (Gill, 2000);
- rituals and ceremonies initiated by the headteacher, such as a leavers' service for year 6 pupils at the end of the school year;
- displays in school corridors and reception areas;
- incidental moments of interaction with members of the school's community related to the spiritual, for example chance encounters that provide opportunities to share mystery or deep concerns, reflecting the nature of spirituality itself; and
- personal demeanours or relational encounters that may embody a spiritual outlook or stance, for example, deep listening, imagination or wonder at the natural world.

3.8.5 Documentation

During my consent visit I asked the headteachers to provide me with copies of documents (initiated by or produced by them) that could provide a contextual background to the schools and extend my understanding of the issues and experiences encountered during our conversations and observations. The list included:

- the school's brochure;
- the school's policy for the spiritual development of its pupils;

- the school's policy for collective worship;
- a copy of its most recent Section 23 or Section 48 report (as applicable); and
- the school's most recent OfSTED report.

In addition, the heads elected to provide other supplementary documentation. For example, photographs of events that we had discussed, letters from parents, newsletters, newspaper cuttings or programmes from school performances. Terry provided copies of letters of thanks from past pupils and colleagues. Margaret provided a discussion document from an INSET day that explored the implications of Corinthians 1 (13. 4-8) for teaching and learning in All Saints' and Peter a copy of his presentation to diocesan colleagues on leadership in faith schools. Further incidental opportunities to enrich and supplement data gathered by these means were taken as they arose, for example through scrutiny of displays in corridors or reception areas during visits to the school for interviews, periods of 'shadowing' or observation of identified events.

An additional strategy, namely that of collecting further data from members of the school's community such as governors or members of staff through interviews was considered, but not implemented on ethical grounds.

3.8.6 Transcribing and analysing data

All interviews were fully transcribed as soon as possible after each research visit. Some nonverbal material such as pauses was included in the transcripts but as the focus of transcription remained mainly on the content of what had been said, nonverbal material was not formally noted or transcribed in detail (Elliott, 2005). However, particularly significant nonverbal communication was captured in my field notes. Punctuation was inserted appropriately to enable easier reading. The data were analysed in two broad 'sweeps'. The first involved a series of 'readings' (Goodley et al., 2004, p.117) that informed the construction of each headteacher's story. The second identified a series of themes present in those stories, such as the heads' perceptions of the development of their professional values and beliefs and the part they played in forming their work.

The heads' interview responses were the key to understanding their spiritual promptings. Following Lawthorn (Goodley et al., 2004) each was subjected the different 'readings' (p.117): a reading for a 'plot' (p.130) through accounts of their experiences; a reading for the way that heads spoke about themselves; a reading for relationships, given the relational nature of spirituality, and a reading for context such as professional expectations or national legislation. So, for example, each head gave an account of professional growth and change. Reading for

'plot' revealed that Terry, Bernadette and Margaret each indicated an early lack of professional confidence; success and the approval of others, including their schools' communities, being a key concept used to judge their own competence. Reading for the way that they spoke about themselves revealed what they were proud of, their personal expectations and achievements, such as Bernadette's account of her long struggle to develop community links. Similarly, reading for relationships revealed the intensely relational nature of headship, but also other relationships that offered spiritual promptings, for example Terry's connection to the natural world or the sense of the divine present in Margaret's story. Both Margaret and Bernadette had found themselves caught between professional expectations and an overwhelming sense of care for their pupils. Though different readings suggested that spiritual promptings were experienced individually by each participant in the study, these individual experiences could be seen to be similar in some ways, making some comparison and contrast between individual headteachers possible. It was from the different readings and similarities in promptings that the individual stories and themes identified in Chapters 4 and 5 emerged.

Statistical coding systems were not used to analyse and categorise narrative data because the heads often used different language to talk about the same phenomenon. So, important nuances and the uniqueness of each head's experiences may have been obscured. The data from observation and documentation were used to contextualise the biographical data and to provide further clues through which the spiritual dimension could be discerned.

3.8.7 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is highly problematic. The difficulty is that the term carries with it implications of objectivity, though the most profound understandings may be gleaned through the personal, subjective interactions between researchers and participants (Seidman, 1991). Following Goodson and Sikes (2001) the validity criterion applied to the research study was that of credibility, in the sense that the headteachers found my interpretation of their experiences, and the emerging image of the spiritual promptings at work in their personal and professional lives to be credible. Woods (1996) encapsulates this as 'insiders confirming the correctness of the analysis' (p.40). My approach to the research was intended to be both reflexive and explicit, which Delamont (2002, p.9) argues is sufficient to address issues of validity in studies of this kind:

As long as qualitative researchers are reflexive, making all their processes explicit, then issues of reliability and validity are served.

Integral to the process of data collection was a continual process of monitoring my own emerging ideas. The sequence of interviews was designed to include two opportunities for respondents to confirm what had been said and validate the image of the spiritual emerging

from the data. Each second interview began with a feedback from interview one, during which I summarised the earlier narrative and sought clarification and confirmation of my interpretations and, if necessary, further elaboration. Interview three began with a similar reflection relating to interviews one and two. Those promptings that may be identified as spiritual were organised to aid discussion prior to that interview using a framework based on common understandings and usage of the term (Halstead and Taylor, 2000; Alexander and McLaughlin, 2003). Each headteacher was asked to supplement, challenge or verify this tentative image of a personal spiritual dimension as it permeated their experiences. Providing opportunities for verification in this way, rather than, for example, inviting comments on transcriptions at some distance from the research activities themselves was intended to sustain a sense of mutuality and immediacy throughout the study. It also allowed difficult personal matters to be revisited in a responsive and sensitive manner and, as it was not offered as another separate research activity, lessened the demands on hard-pressed headteachers' time.

In the event, sufficient broad agreement emerged from each of the headteachers in interview three to support my overall interpretations of the spiritual promptings in their work. Only Peter argued for an understanding of spirituality that was rooted in religious belief and so that the promptings discerned in his work could only be termed spiritual if they were inspired by consciousness of the divine. The faith position he revealed at the time of the study permitted this interpretation.

3.9 Ethical and emotional issues arising during research activities

The Ethical Protocol for the study was submitted to the University of Plymouth's Faculty of Education Ethical Committee and approved before the pilot study began. A key ethical principle of the study was that participation in research activities was based on the informed consent of each headteacher. A summary and overview of the protocol formed the agenda for my consent visits to schools. It detailed procedures for dealing with those ethical issues that could be anticipated in a research study of this kind. Not surprisingly, in the course of the study, less straightforward ethical dilemmas arose. In practice, the consent form had most use for me 'as a crude tool – a conscience' (Fine et al., 2000, p.113) reminding me of my particular responsibilities in the research process.

Confidentiality was promised to each participant and I confirmed that any details that could lead to identification would be anonymised in any report of the research. However, as Goodson and Sikes (2001) point out:

...assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, basic tenets of most ethical codes, are by no means simple and straightforward when it comes to life history work because of personal and idiosyncratic information that is involved and which will probably be

recorded, reported and re-presented in some way. It may be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee total anonymity without substantially altering accounts, and where as in some circumstances this may be justifiable, in others it may require changes of such an order that the work can no longer be considered as life history.
(p. 92)

Similarly, Smythe and Murray (2000, p.320) caution that the information collected from participants in biographically-focussed research is so detailed and individually specific 'that disguising the identities of research participants becomes extremely difficult'.

The names of the headteachers and schools published in the thesis are fictitious. Where the schools were taking part in national or regional educational initiatives, these are reported only generally and details have been omitted to preserve anonymity. One short section of Dave's narrative referred (factually) to a local incident that had received regional publicity and which, if reported, would have revealed the identity and location of Shore Close School. It was omitted from the final transcription for this reason.

The assurances of confidentiality encouraged headteachers to reveal private aspects of their lives. I was uncomfortably aware that discussion of such sensitive topics as breakdown in family relationships or bereavement could cause distress and that I could be opening up painful experiences. Of course, it is not necessarily harmful for headteachers to talk about upsetting or disturbing experiences during the course of an interview. As Elliott (2005) notes, such disclosure 'may in fact be therapeutic or reassuring' (p.137). The headteachers appeared to value the opportunity to talk at length to someone interested in their experiences: Bernadette and Terry cited professional isolation, in its different guises, as a negative influence on their work.

Each interview event was surrounded by more general conversation, typically light banter relating to the demands of contemporary headship, but occasionally and more seriously, relating to sudden, unforeseen events that disturbed the life of the school, for example an earlier serious accident involving a member of staff and its personal impact on Peter. Occasionally, at the end of the formal interview session when recording had ceased, the headteacher continued the conversation. The content of these exchanges varied. Margaret talked of her home area in the north of England with which I was familiar; Terry took the opportunity to ask more about the genesis of my study, my own experiences as a head and to articulate his concerns about his impending retirement, albeit tentatively. Bernadette talked more about her own faith position. After our first interview, Dave produced a file of letters from pupils and parents/carers, praising his work as headteacher very fulsomely. The problem was that such 'off the record' incidents were difficult to report because of the ethical protocol. Delamont (2002, p.130) concludes: 'In general, if the participants know that I am a researcher, I assume that anything said in my vicinity was either meant for me or is 'fair game''. But this seems to raise disturbing issues of protocol and ethical relationships in the

research process. My solution (made easier by the sequential nature of the interviews) was to move the conversation into the arena covered by our agreed ethical protocol, so that it could be used in the study. So Bernadette's reflections on the ineffable nature of spirituality and her concern to promote spirituality through the ongoing life and work of the school after our second interview (Field note, 17th October, 2006) were revisited in the third.

3.9.1 Emotions and the researcher

The interview experience can be a troubling one for the researcher. The impact of any sensitive disclosure is not just on participant, the researcher, too, is engaged in the process. Widdowfield (2000) argues that the relationship between the researcher and the research process is two-way, 'not only does the researcher *affect* the research process, but they are themselves *affected by* this process' (p.200; author's italics). Such emotions have 'an important bearing on both how and what we know' (p.199). Crucially, Widdowfield (2000) warns that:

...not only can emotions affect the research process in terms of what is studied and not studied, by whom and in what way, but they may also influence researchers' interpretations and 'readings' of a situation. (p.199)

She goes on to point out that, somewhat ironically, despite the increased recognition of the subjective nature of the research process and a more reflexive approach to their work on the part of many researchers that recognises their impact on the research process, the place of emotions in these research activities has been largely ignored. Moreover, a consideration of the impact of emotions, the articulation of feelings, on the research process sits easily within the reflexive tradition.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) take the point further:

Conversely, it is worth pointing out that there may be times when it is the researcher who is 'at risk' of harm because the topic is sensitive to them. Again, owing to the nature of life history research, it is not always possible to predict what topics will arise and when. It is important, though, to be aware of the possibility. (p.98)

Widdowfield (2000, p.201), comments that, just as ethical dilemmas can be so intense that progress in research becomes impossible, so emotional dilemmas may have that same debilitating effect:

...upsetting and/or unsettling experiences are as potentially paralysing as ethical dilemmas, with some searchers feeling unable to continue research which brings them into contact with aspects of the world and people's lives which they feel (emotionally) ill-equipped to deal with. This feeling of paralysis may be heightened if the researcher is unconvinced about the potential of the research to 'make a difference'.

Discussion of emotions is particularly important in the context of qualitative methods that bring researchers into contact with participants through, for example, biographically-based interviews and it is difficult to argue that emotions are not an integral part of the research process. Widdowfield (2000) goes further, arguing that emotions 'may affect the way or indeed *whether* (author's italics) a particular piece of research is carried out' (p.201). Recognising the influence of the emotions on the study and the research process is problematic, though in some cases, the influence is fairly apparent. For example, my unease when Dave, with evident distress, described his last moments with his mother, led me to abandon any additional questions relating to his reflections on loss and its perceived influence on his headship.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) describe the dilemmas raised in dealing with a respondent who introduce the sensitive topic of personal bereavement into biographical research interviews. Citing the work of Dygregov and Dygregov (1999), they argue that some respondents talk about bereavement regularly and so to talk about death in an interview situation is not particularly distressing, concluding:

Maybe one answer to the ethical difficulties arising out of sensitive topics is simply to leave to the informant the decision whether to talk about a particular issue: obviously, it is wholly unethical to pursue a topic when an informant does not wish to talk about it. (p. 98)

This was the position adopted through the research study. The ethical protocol agreed with headteachers at the outset stated that they were not required to respond to all questions and could elect not to respond as they wished. They were reminded of this at the start of each interview. During interview three, which revisited issues arising from interviews one and two, including personal loss or bereavement in school and their influences on headship practice, headteachers were reminded that they need only elaborate on those issues with which they felt comfortable. The decision to raise a particular topic and the extent to which it was developed or pursued lay with the heads throughout. In interview two, which included discussion of key episodes or events that had been particularly demanding or stressful, issues of loss or bereavement were not suggested or offered as examples and not discussed unless the heads elected to introduce them.

I offered to suspend the interview with Dave (described above) and stop recording, but he elected to continue. Rory talked about the loss of his wife through each of the sequence of interviews calmly, adopting a matter-of-fact tone, though his pain surfaced occasionally as he recalled particular memories. He saw the inevitability of death through the lens of his Christian Catholic faith and was generally comfortable and open in responding to my questions.

During the research study, the greatest emotional difficulty arose from the unpredictability of the interviews and unexpected accounts of sensitive issues. Moreover, the introduction of

difficult and painful moments into the interviews also raised uncomfortable ethical tensions. In the context of exploring key events and episodes in headteachers' lives, disclosure relating to loss occurred in five of the six headteachers' stories, creating a conflict between sensitivity and data gathering. Yet the moments when deep emotional demands are made may be the times when personal spiritual activity is revealed (Boyle and Healy, 2003). Such events seemed to lead to deep introspection and appeared to impact significantly on headteachers' work in school. For this reason, I felt justified in allowing the heads to explore them. However, I was aware of the potential distress that could be caused and confused about how to respond (Goodley et al., 2004). It could be argued that meeting, recognising and coping with these ethical and emotional dilemmas was a part of my own spiritual journey through the research project. The only way to avoid such exhausting emotional or ethical dilemmas (and such a spiritual journey) may be not to do research of this kind at all (Widdowfield, 2000).

3.10 Evaluation of the research methodologies and data-gathering procedures used in the final research study

The interview sequence may offer some explanation for the unexpected weighting given to what Halstead (1997, p.99) calls 'looking inwards', that is, the inner dimension of spirituality (developing a sense of self and qualities of character) by the heads in the final round of interviews as they discussed their own understandings of the concept. The first two interviews had revealed personal characteristics and capabilities. So, it may be the case that a personal and relational interpretation was uppermost in their minds as they talked about what spirituality meant for them in the third. Only Terry emphasised what may be called spiritual promptings from the natural world, reflecting on creation and his place in it. Reordering the sequence of interviews from that used in the pilot did not, in the event, address the unintended emphasis that may have been given to the inner dimension in the first and second interviews which may have shaped the meaning that the heads gave to the term.

Knowles (2006) writing in the context of a particularly difficult, antagonistic but productive research relationship, suggests that there are useful benefits to be gained by introducing such opportunities for disagreement and challenges the assumption, implicit in many biographically-based in-depth interview procedures that consensual, empathetic dialogue in research interviews is universally appropriate. In the event, the heads offered only limited challenge to my religious and nonreligiously-based images of the spiritual dimension presented in the third interview. Only Peter disagreed, arguing that promptings to his professional actions could be considered spiritual only if they were rooted in his Christian religious belief and inspired by the love of God (interview 3). Again, this may reflect the unease and ambiguity surrounding the term.

3.11 Summary

In this chapter, a rationale for the methodology and data-gathering procedures used in this research study has been detailed and related to its key research questions. An account of the research process as it unfolded has been provided. The particular methodological, ethical and emotional difficulties relating to the biographical case study approach have also been outlined. The research findings from interview data, observations and documentation are set in Chapter 4 as each head's unique 'story' and as a series of 'themes' that permeate these stories in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4

Research findings: the headteachers' stories

4.1 Introduction

The research findings from interview data, observations and documentation are set out below. In this chapter, they are presented as each head's unique 'story'. The stories were constructed from the different 'readings' of the interview data described in Chapter 3 (Goodley et al., 2004, p.117), contextualised and supplemented by observations and documentation and include: those life experiences that the heads regarded as significant and elected to disclose; what they chose to say about themselves and how they said it, for example regarding professional uncertainty or isolation; their relationships, given the highly relational nature of spirituality and the context that informed their work, including professional expectations or the demands of national legislation.

Data are presented in this way so that each personal and professional life and the processes that have formed them may be understood holistically, respecting what may be regarded as the wholeness of each head, an important condition for understanding their spiritual promptings and their responses to them. The stories are particularly important in illuminating what some may call spiritual capacities and characteristics in heads' lives, such as compassion or integrity. They are central to the thesis because it is through the heads' stories that the spiritual dimension in their personal and professional lives can be best understood. Indeed, Priestley (2005) argues that discerning someone's spirituality necessarily requires 'recourse to biography', because it is to do with being, with 'what we are' (p.211) and have become, not just with issues of knowing and doing.

4.2 Margaret's story

Margaret was head of All Saints' Church of England Primary School, a small rural school. At the time of the research study, she had some part-time teaching responsibilities. She was a committed and active member of a Christian faith community. In our first interview, Margaret described her experience of what she perceived as her call by God during her first year at university and the subsequent submission of her life to his direction, discerned and confirmed through prayer and reflection on scripture:

But, the whole kind of direction thing changed when I became a Christian because it was kind of, right well here I am, where do you want me? And it's just gone on like that really, which is why I'm here now. (interview 1)

Margaret's degree course had required her to spend some time working with children abroad; a new experience that she regarded with some trepidation, but that eventually led her into teaching. Her first degree was followed by a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course and a period as a classroom teacher. Subsequently, Margaret became deputy headteacher of a small rural community primary school, though, as she applied for it, she did not quite believe that she was up to the job.

Margaret was ambivalent about becoming a headteacher. She was amongst the first cohort of NPQH candidates and initially intended to use the programme as an opportunity to enhance her work in school, rather than to progress to headship. However, the head of her school was asked to take over the headship of a nearby school pending a permanent appointment and she became acting head in his absence. That experience and Margaret's coincidental, and somewhat unexpected, enjoyment of the financial management training provided through the NPQH seemed to have led her to think that a headship in her own right might be feasible. Margaret was appointed to the headship of All Saints', the only headship that she had applied for, though she had some doubts about herself as 'headship material' (interview 3).

During interview 3, I approached the issue of doubt; whether she had ever felt that her response to God's call had led her to attempt something that seemed beyond her, including headship. She reflected:

I often think that I don't know if I can do this, but...hmmm...I quite often think, 'If he wants me to it, he'll give me the wherewithal to do it, so let's step out and see'. You know, it's like when you go to an interview, like when I came to this interview, I didn't think I was headship material necessarily although other people had said so. You are aware of big and scary before you even step out there. But, there were so many pieces that fitted together when I got the job that I was just convinced that it was the right place to be and I just knew that he'd look after me. But it doesn't make it any less scary, really, necessarily. But there's that - I'm not sure what it's going to look like – but the help will be there. And it always has. (interview 3)

Margaret characterised her headship as her response to God's call. So, though she was an innovative, well respected and successful head, she continued to wear her headship lightly, aware that that same call may require her to leave the school and move to a new challenge in her life.

She recalled her use of Christian symbol and scripture as she took up her headship, working for the first time in a faith-based school and community and anxious to set the appropriate tone:

So I made sure that I put a cross in the office, only a little one, but then I also...I think it's really helpful to have scripture to kind of chew on really...I got the Lord's Prayer and Corinthians 13 to put up in the office, just the bit about always persevering and trusting. I just think it's really powerful for schools actually, because it is about working with difficult people, isn't it? (interview 2)

As well as a relationship with the divine (and through it, with herself), Margaret described other relationships that had brought both joy and pain. She cited the people that she worked with in school as a source of sustenance, but was aware of her responsibilities to them:

I think you're more and more conscious each time of the huge responsibility for managing peoples' lives. It's such a treat, the people he's brought along here. They're just lovely to work with. Yes, so they keep me going. (interview 2)

Margaret's headship had had its challenges. During her first year, determined to lead from the classroom, she had taught a difficult class of older pupils, refusing to 'give up on them' (interview 1). In the process, according to her narrative, she had learnt a great deal about promoting self-esteem and positive behaviour management. She also described a drawn-out staff capability procedure as a particularly difficult experience, creating some conflict between her compassion for the person involved and the expectations of her as head of her school, reflecting: 'There's somebody's life out there. What if I'm wrong?' (interview 2).

Margaret's chair of governors was a valued confidante and this relationship helped to relieve her sense of professional isolation during these procedures. She had established a network of contacts that provided personal and professional support in different ways, including teacher friends, other heads and church groups. Such relationships had also provided welcome affirmation for her work, as did visits to other schools and reports from OfSTED's and diocesan inspectors. Margaret reflected on how the demands of headship had limited her involvement in the wider mission of her own church community, though she saw her work in school in itself as a 'life ministry' (interview 2). She had shared OfSTED's report of its inspection of All Saints' with her church members to make the link between her ministry and schoolwork more tangible.

Margaret described her discomfort (and resistance) when regulatory demands did not sit easily with her gospel values, for example a requirement to serve penalty notices to parents/carers for their children's absence from school, which she saw as self-defeating and irrelevant to the problems faced by the families that she knew. She also talked about a particularly demanding pupil that she nearly 'gave up' on. However, following a diocesan course and reflection on her own living out of her gospel values, she resolved to offer 'radical inclusion' (interview 2) and arranged for additional resources and support. The pupil had subsequently transferred successfully to a nearby secondary school. Margaret concluded:

But it was one of those 'needed to get right down there' moments before thinking, 'No, we're not going to give up yet'. (interview 2)

In the midst of these pressures, she defined a weekly time and space for herself and her husband and 'a good solid two weeks in the sunshine every year' (interview 3) to recharge her batteries, aware that headship could become all-consuming. She professed to liking her

own company; getting her best ideas, letting her mind go, whilst engaged in routine household tasks.

All Saints' was inspected by both OfSTED's and diocesan denominational education inspectors during the period of the research. OfSTED's inspectors reported that Margaret provided strong leadership; that provision for pupils' spiritual development was outstanding and that the school's Christian spiritual values (associated in the report with positive and caring relationships) were exemplified consistently by pupils and staff. The diocesan inspector, like OfSTED's, noted that Margaret offered an inspirational role model for her school's community and that her Christian values were reflected in the way that she led the school, citing the positive impact of her leadership on the quality of relationships and the family feel of the school.

The school's policy for spiritual development indicated that pupils were provided with opportunities for developing: awareness of themselves and the value and worth of others; self-respect; a sense of wonder and mystery through encounters with the natural world and their use of imagination through encounters that provide inspiration and insight. Teaching in All Saints' School, included in the policy for spiritual development, was intended to provide activities and experiences that allowed pupils to feel, reflect, recognise the impact of experience and the challenge that it may offer to them and apply insights to their own lives. Evidence from the diocesan inspector's report suggested that this element of the policy, in particular, was reflected in the school's practice. He had noted that pupils were encouraged to develop a rich language which enabled them to express and explore their own feelings and respond to those of others; a direct result, in his view, of the outworking of the school's Christian values. This capacity to engage with complex issues had supported pupils in becoming confident learners. Time for reflection and stillness was identified as an integral part of school life, helping pupils to think deeply about their experiences.

My observation of Margaret as she worked with gifted and talented pupils from across the school designing a questionnaire to investigate those things that best help pupils' learning, illuminated the inspector's comments. She listened, affirmed and posed problems such as, 'What is a lesson?' to stimulate their metacognitive understanding (Field note, 5th June, 2006). Commonly, my notes recorded humour and laughter interspersing Margaret's encounters with pupils, staff and parents/carers around the school. The major source of her humour appeared to lie in her joy at school events and interpersonal encounters, often involving pupils.

As a part of her documentation to support the research project, Margaret provided a record of a staff development day for teaching staff and teaching assistants during which the implications of Corinthians 1 (13. 4-8) for the teaching and learning in All Saints' were considered. In her accompanying note to me, she wondered whether this meeting was:

...one of those moments after which people started saying what I would have said – except I no longer needed to. I've just thought this now. You don't notice it happen, but it must start somewhere. I suppose this is where you 'share the vision'. (private correspondence, 18th June, 2007)

The record linked verses from Corinthians, beliefs and values and implications for teaching and learning in the school. So, the implications of 'Love does not envy' are linked to the school's values of acceptance, satisfaction with what 'we have and are as made by God' and individual differences. 'Love does not envy' was perceived to have implications for teaching and learning through its requirement to be 'pleased for others', to celebrate success and to use personal strengths to 'support others'. Margaret's school prospectus (given to parents or carers enquiring about children's entry to the school) stated that the school had a strong Christian ethos and that Christian values were promoted across the curriculum. The relational values of Corinthians 1 (13. 4-8) were identified particularly as those that school's community sought to model. The staff development session was designed to review that process.

The school's vision statement (precised to preserve its anonymity) cited the glory of God and mutual inspiration as its twin aspirations. Its aims included the demonstration of Christian values; opportunities to experience awe and wonder; fostering respect for the religious, spiritual and moral values of others and fostering responsibility for the environment and sense of stewardship for all life forms. These ran alongside promotion of achievement (related to the national curriculum) and intellectual challenge and appeared to reflect the pragmatic balance that Margaret struck between sustaining her personal beliefs and meeting external requirements. In our discussions, she described her vision of one of 'great teaching and learning' and so of providing pupils with 'rich opportunities' and 'good memories' (interview 2).

Towards the end of the summer term, Margaret invited me to attend a church service for Year 6 pupils who were leaving the school to transfer to different local secondary schools. My field notes recorded the ritual, symbol and ceremonial, rooted in the Christian faith tradition of the school, which marked this important transitional moment. Year 6 pupils were seated around the altar, facing the congregation which included representatives of the whole community. During the service, pupils from different year groups spoke positively about those who were leaving, reminding them that memories of them would remain behind; that they would not be forgotten. In turn, the year 6 leavers talked positively about each other. Often, they cited personal capacities like humour, helpfulness, caring or friendship, recalling events and experiences such as school visits that they had shared together. Towards the end of the service, each leaver was given a copy of the Bible. The service closed with a reflection on the community's shared experiences and memories, together with its hopes for the future.

Margaret dressed more formally than I had been used to for our interviews, which had taken place at the end of busy school days. Before the service began she greeted parents, carers and governors as they arrived, handing them a service booklet, occasionally exchanging brief

organisational conversation with staff. She led the opening prayer, thanking God for the good and exciting things that had happened during the year; 'help us to worship you now' and humorously, asking God to help those pupils who were feeling nervous about reading and playing musical instruments during the service. Margaret was an accomplished pianist. During the service, she smiled and encouraged from a distance, seated at the piano, offering an unobtrusive nod of affirmation to pupils as they spoke, read and sang (Field note, 25th July 2006).

Towards the end of the autumn term, I was invited to an evening production of the school's Christmas performance; a modern, but recognisably traditional presentation of the nativity story. The performance took place in the hall of a nearby secondary school; All Saints' own accommodation being inadequate for the numbers attending. Margaret was formally dressed, again emphasising the importance of the occasion. Before the performance, she moved amongst the rows of waiting 'shepherds' and 'angels' (younger pupils), bending to get alongside each pupil as she smiled and spoke. As the performance began, she took centre stage and introduced the play; she told parents and carers humorously that there were 'serious bits' and asked that, if young children needed 'to wriggle', they should be taken out and then returned. Margaret explained to me later that this was to ensure that pupils performing in the play had had the best opportunity to present themselves.

Margaret accompanied the performance on the piano, the pupils glancing at her occasionally for their singing cues. The audience applauded throughout, clapped the rhythm during a dance routine and took photographs. There was an audible gasp as the curtains opened to reveal the 'angels' in white and gold costumes. At the end of the performance, Margaret took the stage, thanked all involved and asked the performers (all the pupils in the school) to applaud their parents and carers for attending.

During interview 3, we revisited the image of Margaret as 'conductor' that had struck me during the Christmas performance. In interview 2, Margaret had introduced the metaphor of her leadership as conducting an orchestra, confessing to a degree of shyness in public (as did other heads in the study). She described how events and experiences had changed her:

...actually this is a conductor who's got their back to the audience, so everybody's noticing everybody else, but you're there like the good referee, you don't get noticed, but you're there and I do quite like that picture; I'm not good at the ...you get better at it don't you, because you have to do it. (interview 2)

Margaret included the Christmas play as an example of a spiritual moment, returning to her relational definition and citing the play as an instance 'where everybody has done something together as a school' (interview 3).

Margaret identified spirituality initially through an image of its absence, citing the collective worship that she had led in her early days as a head when she felt ill at ease and so 'read it from a book and kept it as simple and ticking over as possible' (interview 3). Spirituality, for her, was found in the quality of personal relationships. It thrived when relationships were relaxed and secure. It revealed itself, unpredictably and unplanned, as the 'surprising bit of a person' (interview 3). It was 'who you are as a person' (interview 3), an identity that grew and was shaped by life's experiences. In school, spirituality was 'roused' (interview 3) by providing opportunities for children to feel at ease with themselves, to express themselves and to search for what they wanted to say. Such spirituality, for her, was not confined to religious believers. Margaret's own spirituality was sustained by reflection and prayer, for example to remind herself of her belief that her professional relationships had not arisen by accident even when they were difficult.

For Margaret, her preferred legacy, as and when she left All Saints', was a school that pupils could continue to return to, that would offer them support and provide a link to those who had moved on; a fixed point of stability for the community to come. She wanted to leave behind a place that pupils who had left would not forget. This was particularly so for the vulnerable; her way of not giving up on them.

4.3 Bernadette's story

Bernadette had been headteacher of St Mary's Church of England Infant and Nursery School for thirteen years at the time that the research study began. During that time, she had initiated and developed a widely recognised and highly regarded range of opportunities for supporting families with very young children and including them in the work of the school.

Bernadette had been brought up in a traditional Catholic family with strong Irish roots. She had attended a selective Catholic convent school and a Catholic teacher training institution. Over the years, she had come to question key aspects of Catholic Christian doctrine and had developed what she called 'a particular spin' (interview 1) on her faith:

I am still a Christian, but many Christians would consider me not a Christian and certainly not a Catholic. I am Catholic by tradition. Catholicism is tied into my childhood.
(interview 1)

Bernadette argued that her belief was that it was 'our humanity' that was 'God-like' and so it was the humanity of Jesus, rather than his divinity, that was of prime importance. As God's image was reflected in our humanity, so 'our purpose in life is to become the best people that we can be' (interview 1) and her professional obligation, as she saw it, was to enable all members of the school's community to fulfil this purpose. This same theme of 'being the best that you can be' was revisited through story and prayer during a school assembly led by Bernadette that I attended during a field visit (Field note, 2nd October 2006).

Bernadette had spent her early teaching career in Catholic inner-city schools, gradually taking responsibility for and developing her own expertise in equal opportunities, issues of gender and race and their implications for education being particularly important to her. However, she had become increasingly concerned about what she perceived as growing negative influences on her eldest son as he reached adolescence and had decided to move to a rural area where she subsequently, with the encouragement of a headteacher colleague, took up headship.

Bernadette seemed to have decided that she could best realise her own vision of younger pupils' education through headship, in spite of her own lack of career ambition:

...it was really that that brought me into headship – the opportunity to lead a school and lead it in a very particular way and challenge those things which I thought ought not to be there. (interview 1)

During interview 2, Bernadette described her vision of education in St Mary's as a tripartite process involving community, family and school. She was committed to the *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) agenda and so to creating an open school that worked with other agencies supporting the development of young children.

St Mary's aims, published in the school's brochure for parents/carers, reflected Bernadette's child-centred perspective on the education process and her strong commitment to promoting a fully inclusive school community in the context of the school's Christian tradition. Information on the curriculum, as well as a commitment to high standards of work, included the aim of providing opportunities and time for pupils to reflect on their work. Her concern and respect for the natural world were mirrored in further aims related to sustainability. My field notes of a school assembly recorded that it was signed for a pupil with a hearing impairment, offering some confirmation of the inclusive nature of the school's community (Field note, 2nd October, 2006). OfSTED's inspectors noted that St Mary's relationships with the school's community were very good and recorded its work with parents/carers as a strength. The diocesan inspector made similar comments, reporting the strong, caring ethos of the school.

During interview 2 we talked about the role of faith in Bernadette's decision making; whether her personal Christian faith could lead to assumptions that proved to be unhelpful in her dealings with others who did not share her Christian background. She responded that it was not her faith that could cloud matters, but her understanding of pupils' development in the early years. She drew on examples from her experience in her work for equal opportunities that had raised questions within her about her own dispositions and values and the dangers of imposing them cross-culturally:

I think that's more of a danger for me, a thing I have to be constantly aware of; am I reacting to that child's need, or the family's need, or am I reacting to their need from a perspective that's mine and not theirs? (interview 2)

She did not, however, advocate a simple relativism. There were some things, in her view, that simply 'stand as true'. (interview 2)

Bernadette saw no substantive conflict between the demands of the current standards agenda and her concern to locate pupils' needs at the centre of the school's work; a false dichotomy in her view. For her, curriculum access was a matter of social justice:

It's social justice again, it is to give those children autonomy, it is to give them the skills to make choices and the skills to operate independently: life skills. I actually embraced that agenda to raise standards and I think as a staff we have a collective understanding of that. (interview 3)

She went on to argue that having pupils at the heart of the curriculum required providing them with the flexibility and learning skills to meet the (as yet unknown) demands of the future. She commented: '...in doing that we ought to be able to raise standards' and continued, 'How we meet that agenda, I think is important' (interview 3).

Bernadette described herself as non-hierarchical in her approach to school leadership. Nonetheless, she argued that there were particular times when the final decision must lie with her; that she had a different, more holistic perspective on the school from that of a class teacher. As Bernadette took up her post at St Mary's, she had encountered initial resistance from some members of the then staff to her leadership style which, she commented, was very different from that of her predecessor. She recalled:

I opened up an opportunity for them in a staff meeting: 'I will discuss my leadership style and my management. What isn't up for grabs is my personality'. I had to get that boundary. (interview 1)

Staff changes over the ensuing three or four years had enabled her to recruit new staff, creating what she regarded as an appropriate balance between less and more experienced colleagues:

The balance is actually very healthy and there's high morale in the school at the moment but it's taken some time to get there. (interview 1)

My field notes record laughter in a staff meeting at the prospect of being filmed for a PE demonstration. Bernadette had an easy humorous manner as she asked at the same meeting for volunteers for induction sessions for parents/carers: 'I'll be twisting arms if I don't get volunteers' (Field note, 17th October 2006). One member of staff remarked to me informally: 'If I ever get cynical about education, I think of [Bernadette]' (Field note, 17th October, 2006).

Bernadette confessed that she had been very shy as she began her teacher training and had almost left her course during her first period of practical teaching in school. Over her years of school leadership, she felt that she had developed what she called a 'quiet, internal

confidence' (interview 2) because she was motivated by 'the right reasons' (interview 2); the best interests of her staff and pupils. She still found public speaking difficult, but felt experienced and confident in what she had to say, particularly as an advocate for early years education.

Bernadette recalled two events that had forced her to question her own role as head, its powers and boundaries and her own effectiveness in discharging her responsibilities. During our second interview, I asked her if she had had to deal with a situation for which there was no easy procedure or rule book to follow and what personal resources she may have drawn upon to affect a resolution. Bernadette described a long running conflict between two families in her school's community that had resulted in unpleasant scenes at the school's gate and some physical violence. She appeared torn between maintaining a professional distance and her concern for young pupils, caught up in and witnessing the episode:

My common sense told me don't step there because it's out of school, it's beyond my remit, keep away from it. Another problem is there are children involved here and they are my responsibility. (interview 2)

Bernadette had informed the appropriate agencies, but their responses did not seem to her to be improving the situation. She decided to act, interviewing each of the adults concerned in her office, informing them that she knew what was happening and of her disappointment. She had told them, in her words:

I didn't want it to continue outside of the school and I don't want it to impact on the children. (interview 2)

The friction had halted following her interventions, but at the time of our interview, she was concerned that this appeared to be a temporary lull. The experience had left Bernadette '...exhausted. I was nervous because I was outside my professional competence' (interview 2).

She summed up her feelings:

So, anxiety that my common sense was telling me that I shouldn't go there but there was something else within me that said, 'You can't leave this', either. So, nervous going through it; I felt angry with them, but I contained my anger. But at the end I actually felt sorry for them, but I could feel no empathy, which is sad really, but I couldn't. (interview 2)

Bernadette recalled that she had prayed for strength and patience, drawing on her own value system to sustain her as she challenged the parents' behaviour. Prayer also appeared to provide a time and space for her to consider her role and where professional boundaries for heads in this situation might lie:

I know that, and some people might not consider this for prayer but for me it is. One of my thoughts was God give me strength, give me patience (pause) but also it does make you reflect on - I had to really think - what is my purpose here, as head of this school? But also as a person and can there be a cut off point? I've got to give them time. What I mustn't do is give advice that I'm not qualified to give. (interview 3)

Our discussion returned to Bernadette's personal prayer later in the same interview. She commented that she was 'quite a prayerful person'; prayer being her natural reaction or 'unconscious response' to being confused, challenged or afraid.

The second event was also relational. She recalled an episode concerning a teacher's ridiculing of a pupil with special educational needs. Bernadette had reacted with mixed emotions, simultaneously questioning her own grip on what went on, suffering a 'crisis of confidence' (interview 1) and a sense of devastation that her talks with staff about the school's ethos appeared to have been fruitless:

I felt culpable... I felt that because it had happened, I should have been able to protect that child, those children, from that kind of behaviour. I felt besmirched by it, I suppose. That was a very low moment. I have only met that a couple of times, but that's enough to make you question what happens in classrooms which is why rhetoric and actual practice matters so much to me. (interview 1)

During our first interview, Bernadette talked about the sudden death of her son some years earlier and the personal and professional influences of that loss. She had:

...taken for granted that at times of trouble God would be there and I have to say, I didn't find God at that time. (interview 1)

It was a few years later that she realised that she still had a Christian faith, albeit tinged with doubts, and recalled:

...it sustained me then but that void was awful, for a long time. (interview 2)

She had coped by immersing herself in her work and caring for her family, refusing counselling. She suggested that the experience had informed her understanding of and response to the lives of her school's families when relationships were severed and family members, particularly young mothers, were left isolated. It had, she said, helped her to mature emotionally and to develop a new level of 'empathy and understanding' (interview 1).

Bernadette described various sources of joy, reflecting her satisfaction at the community links that she had developed and her excitement with both the processes and outcomes of pupils' learning. She talked about one of her great joys; the project with families within the school's community which she had initiated and which continued to flourish: 'That for me is success' (interview 1).

Bernadette described her excitement when pupils collaborated in their learning, realising that they could learn from each other as well as from adults. She provided an example from a Key Stage 1 science lesson:

They were having a science lesson and they broke into groups that were working together and the conversations between these children which were about extending each other's learning. It wasn't, 'You're copying,' it was, 'How can I help you; you're stuck?' (interview 1)

She concluded: 'And when I've seen that, that's when I come out with hands up in the air and say, 'Yes!'' (interview 1).

Similarly Bernadette talked of her pleasure in sharing a book with a younger pupil, about her excitement at pupils' art work and pupils' evident wonder at the natural world:

We've got some photographs out in the woods. They were lying on their backs, looking up at the trees. You can see the absolute wonder; because they've never seen trees look like that. (interview 1)

She also described sharing her own enthusiasms with pupils. She recalled her own pleasure as a child, walking in mud, touching bracken and gorse and feeling rain on her face and how her desire that pupils should have those experiences had led her to develop a small area of woodland in St Mary's school grounds to offer such opportunities.

She had shared her own coloured pencils with her pupils:

We had a session drawing with them. So I brought those back to the children and actually it was some of the best drawings that they've done so they sensed and shared my enthusiasm, I think. (interview 2)

During a field visit, I attended one of a regular series of tea parties, hosted by Bernadette, to which she had invited a small number of Reception and Year 1 pupils. Her intention was to encourage their reading through sharing books that they enjoyed. She served cake and drinks, taking delight in their efforts and confiding: 'I like beautiful books. I love a good story' (Field note, 17th January, 2006).

Bernadette referred to the importance of opportunities for personal reflection for herself, her staff and pupils in school at different points in our interviews. She recalled the lasting influence of a retreat at her convent school, before she moved on to higher education:

It can be wonderful; I'd been given space to really think. That does still impact on my teaching and how I am in school. (interview 1)

She was concerned that her pupils' lives lacked this experience of quiet and was 'trying to create a school where there are quiet times' (interview 2), not just when pupils' were reflecting on their learning, but other moments when they could 'stop and stare' (interview 2).

Bernadette, on her own admission, found little time for personal reflection at home or in school. She did, though, find herself drawn to sacred spaces for her own quiet thoughts. She described her reaction to a recent visit to a local cathedral: 'it was a celebration and the choir was singing; that was a moment for me' (interview 2). She talked, too, of a planned visit to London:

I'm with a friend who is a devout Catholic and I know that we're going to end up in Westminster and we'll have a few quiet moments there but I do find that, it's probably from my childhood, that a church or a Cathedral - even if I'm not thinking holy thoughts - it's wonderful how it has the ambiance for reflection. (interview 2)

She confessed to being able to lose herself in her painting, though doubted that such loss of self-awareness could be called reflection:

That's a 'me' time, it's not really reflection; it's a deep concentration on a subject and I can do that for eight hours without realising the time has gone. It's a long time, I don't feel the need to eat or drink or anything, it just goes. (interview 2)

Bernadette had introduced an individual private log that teachers were encouraged to maintain to facilitate reflection on personal and professional matters, often during planned time set aside in staff meetings (Field note, 17th October, 2006).

Before our second interview began, Bernadette talked of the ineffable nature of spirituality and her concern to promote spirituality through all aspects of the ongoing life and work of the school (informal conversation, 17th October, 2006). In our final conversation she described her difficulties in defining spirituality with sufficient precision to devise a written policy for promoting pupils' spiritual development in St Mary's school. She was unwilling to adopt a policy that had been devised elsewhere:

One of the reasons I've got somebody coming to work with us in February is because I have had great difficulty in defining that and I'm not sure I fully know. I think I have felt it but I'm not sure that I have the words to define it. I mean spirituality, for me it's the capacity, I suppose, to experience and feel (pause) things like wonder and things like inspiration and the ability to take your thinking beyond your day-to-day experiences. I can't quite define it. I've always found it extremely....which is why we haven't written a policy. I find it extremely difficult. I think you see it in other people and you see it happening and you experience it, but to define it; I don't know that I can. (interview 3)

Her diocesan denominational education inspection report had identified the production of a formal whole school policy for spiritual development in the school as an issue for

development. The February staff-development session, to which she referred, was a part of that process.

Bernadette remarked that what she called the 'process' (interview 2) of her career and the experiences and understandings gained along the way had been more important to her than external recognition in the form of accredited awards or the posts that she had held. She took some considerable pride in her development of the school and its partnership with parents, particularly through its early years centre which provided a range of opportunities for supporting the school's community and involving them in the school's work. However, she confided:

Letting go of it is not going to be easy. I think when I leave I will have to walk completely away and not come back and just let somebody else take it on. (interview 2)

Bernadette had some regrets. She hadn't travelled and seen as much of the world as she would have liked or taken her academic studies further, perhaps into research in education. She regretted, too, not developing her painting:

I gave my time to education and shelved that. I regret that a little bit but I knew I was making that choice. I knew what the impact would be. (interview 2)

4.4 Peter's story

Peter was headteacher of Holy Trinity Church of England Primary School, his second headship. At the time of our interviews, he had been Holy Trinity's head for seven years. He had recently taken on simultaneous, additional headship responsibilities for a smaller primary school nearby, pending longer term decisions about its leadership and governance.

Peter had been brought up as a member of the Church of Wales but had ceased to have any active involvement with the church for some years during his early teaching career. Peter's doubts and critical perspective on his faith, by his own account, had shaped his decision-making processes as a head, in that they had made him question his own 'views and values' (interview 3) and so adopt a more reflective and nuanced approach to finding solutions to his professional dilemmas. Peter revealed that his family background contained 'a lot of teaching and teachers' (interview 1). He had considered a career in biological science, but confessed that he had 'always wanted to be a teacher' (interview 1).

After his initial teacher training, Peter had taught in a range of contexts, including a period of time educating travellers' children. Subsequently, after a deputy headship, he was appointed to his first headship, though he felt that he had been less than fully informed about the school and the extent of its difficulties prior to his appointment. Soon after he had taken up the post, following an earlier unfavourable inspection, Peter had found himself facing a tight deadline

for improvement set by HMI. The experience shook him. He reported his reaction as the '...most frightened I've been in my educational career' (interview 1).

Peter went on to describe how he had set about making changes, believing that the learning experiences provided for pupils lay at the heart of any school:

So the first thing, back to what I believe in, the curriculum drives the school, to start attacking the issues of the school, to win over everybody too, that the curriculum drives the school forward...I attacked from the curriculum side. (interview 1)

During interview 2, he described a 'Democracy Day' that he had organised for older pupils to raise expectations and aspirations in the school:

We had the children interview six or seven different candidates for parliament during the day to see how they took that on, how they organised themselves, organised their questions and how they actually ran the meeting with each one of these people. Actually they would have said twelve months before those children couldn't do it. Sometimes I think that's the real 'hair' bit when children do something that other people think they're not able to do.

A close personal identification with the performance and standing of the school was evident in Peter's account: 'my reputation was on the line' and 'it was a personal challenge' (interview 1). On his own admission, he had 'lived the school' (interview 1).

A determination to overcome the school's problems and a willingness to use national accountability structures to improve things appeared to see Peter through. He admitted to having an intensely competitive character:

Me, I don't lose, I don't. I never enter into anything not to succeed. So that was it; that kept me going, you know. (interview 1)

Peter described how he had become very familiar with Ofsted's inspection criteria and expectations, so that he could use the inspection system to his advantage. He also confessed to having learnt a lot, without realising it at the time, about dealing with colleagues in stressful situations.

Eventually, Peter had moved to Holy Trinity. Again, he had faced the challenges of preparing a school which had serious weaknesses in leadership and management for an Ofsted inspection. In particular, he had needed to change the professional culture of a staff that had been used to a distinctly hierarchical style of school leadership, to being 'told' and so, according to Peter, felt little ownership either of the curriculum or of classroom teaching.

Holy Trinity had become a successful school and Peter was highly respected locally and regionally. Ofsted's inspectors, reporting shortly before our interviews began, had

commented that Peter led the school 'extremely well' and that he had a clear vision for its development. Inspectors had found that the school offered a range of opportunities for pupils to develop basic skills across the curriculum and that pupils' learning was stimulated by a range of visits outside school and visitors to the school. Pupils' personal development, which included their working relationships, had been reported as outstanding.

Peter was clear that his Christian faith and socialist outlook had shaped his priorities in school:

I don't see any conflict there; I know some people would. I entered education believing that every child has a right to everything we can offer and we should not be selective in how we approach that. (interview 3)

Holy Trinity School's aims reflected the values and priorities that Peter described through his narrative, particularly his emphasis on developing pupils' learning skills within a stimulating curriculum, set in the context of a Christian faith school. The school's aims included: developing pupils' spiritual understanding; promoting self discipline; provision of a broad curriculum; encouraging creativity and enquiring minds and a disposition for lifelong learning.

The diocesan inspector had noted Peter's vision and commitment in developing the Christian ethos of Holy Trinity. She had confirmed the school's emphasis on developing pupils' creativity and imagination, which she associated with pupils' confidence in expressing their emotions and feelings. She had reported that pupils were given very good opportunities for reflection on their experiences, for example through role-play and drama and in the times for silence included in their encounters with the environment. Pupils were encouraged in their expressions of an explicitly Christian spirituality through religious practices such as prayer at lunchtime and at the end of the school's day.

Holy Trinity had close links with a local initial teacher training institution and Peter had contributed to its primary education programme as an occasional guest speaker. Just before the research study began, he had given a presentation to potential new entrants to the profession about primary teaching's core values as he saw them as a serving head. He provided me with a copy of the Power Point slides that he had used. In his presentation, Peter had raised issues about the purposes of education and the nature of good teaching, linking that to the notion of a moral profession, drawing on the work of Michael Fullan. He had returned to his commitment to a rich process-based curriculum, seeing pupils as active, cooperative learners, their learning evaluated against a broad set of outcomes. He had used examples from Holy Trinity to illustrate a range of learning experiences for its pupils, all engaging them practically in their work, for example in making musical instruments.

We discussed Peter's references to moral purpose further during interview 2. For him, it was about not doing things in schools simply because they had been imposed. Rather, teachers' motivations should be grounded in what he called moral purpose:

...which means that you believe that you're doing something which will make a positive influence on every child's life to make them a better person. (interview 2)

A better person, for him, was a 'good learner' (interview 2). So, the curriculum was about preparation for life, including what the pupil was to become as well as the acquisition of knowledge and skills ...'and actually explaining that this is how you can be, and isn't it exciting?' (interview 2).

Peter felt that his first headship had constituted, on his part, 'a huge personal investment' (interview 1). He had, notionally, distributed some leadership activities, but admitted to not letting go completely. He went on to talk about changes in his headship style as he moved to Holy Trinity, utilising the experiences of his first headship. He seemed to have developed a more strategic, less immediate approach to what had to be done, adopting a more consultative, transformational style:

Yes, I learned a lot about walking the walk, whichever way you want to talk about, it's about the commitment you have to give to time and energy and personal stuff to every member of staff, to get them to understand where you are and where you want to go. (interview 1)

He was critical of fast track or competence-based headship training programmes and felt that they neglect the personal and emotional aspects of the job.

During the period of the research study, Peter had given a presentation on spiritual leadership to headteachers and deputy headteachers of Anglican schools in his diocese. He provided me with a printed copy of the Power Point slides that he had used. Peter's challenge to his audience had been to reflect critically on how Christian values could be reconciled with the current accountability regime and standards agenda. In his view, headteachers of Christian faith schools should be reflecting consistently on the relationship between their faith and their actions, for example in making teaching appointments or decisions about leave of absence from school (Field note following informal discussion, 27th November, 2006). Peter appeared to conceptualise spiritual leadership itself as a function of the vision and inspiration of the head, drawing on Galatians 5 (22-23) describing the fruits of the Spirit, rich curricular provision (Peter used examples from Holy Trinity of a visiting dance group) and the promotion of inclusive, positive relationships amongst the school's community.

Peter elected to introduce the deaths of his parents and that of a pupil in school where he was the deputy headteacher into his narrative. He associated the growing doubts about his faith that he had experienced with the loss of his parents, both of whom died after lingering

illnesses: 'You then question why and wherefore' (interview 1). His gradual return to Christian commitment seemed due in part to the influence of his headteacher at the time that a member of Peter's class had died suddenly and the way that he had dealt with the pupil's family:

So those sorts of things also affected me, I found dealing with children you teach who die very difficult. I was working in a Church of England school at the time and actually my strength, my belief, my faith, was strengthened by it because of how brilliantly the head of the school, I was deputy at the time, dealt with it and he was a very Christian man and I saw an element of his faith working properly. (interview 1)

We discussed what sort of preparation could be provided for such events for school leaders and if, indeed, if there was any suitable preparation. Peter appeared to argue that his life experiences formed the basis of his own preparation, enabling him to set the 'tone of how we work and how people can support' (interview 1). He drew on his experience of the death of his mother and how he had kept his visits to her to himself: 'I actually didn't in fact tell anybody' (interview 1). This led him to reflect:

I think those sort of things also affect how then you deal with other people because you then, I think, understand better when people seem to be a little reserved, stand-offish. It's their way of dealing with it. It doesn't mean it's not hurting, it's not mattering – so if you can, go and say, 'Whatever you need, whatever you want, whatever I can do you can ask. If you don't ask, I don't mind, but it's always here.' (interview 1)

We returned to issues of death and loss in our second conversation. I asked more about religious faith and how, in Peter's view, religious belief did or did not help in his supporting of members of the school's community through the grieving process. He argued that a faith commitment may be a hindrance, if it led to a lack of empathy; to an impression of not listening to people or disregarding their perceptions of loss. It was more important to 'be a listener' (interview 2).

Later, we returned to the head that had so impressed Peter in the way that he had dealt with the death of a pupil:

Stephen: *What did this headteacher do that impressed you; you said he was brilliant. What did he do?*

Peter: *He just came across as a very good man and very compassionate but didn't put any moral values on what was happening. It was something that he could have made a moral judgment on from his belief and faith and it might have been anti, but he didn't play morals or value. He just gave space and time and understanding to a person who was going through a very, very difficult time and he invested huge amounts of time and personal energies into that and that came from being a good man, rather than necessarily a person of a religious faith but that's what he was. What he did was to be there whenever this person needed him. (interview 2)*

Peter was clear though, that support should not become emotional dependence or a displacement of emotional baggage. Simply, the ongoing pressures of headship precluded that, even if it was desirable:

You just allow them to actually comes to terms with what they're doing and he did that so well, he allowed that person to rebuild themselves and once they rebuilt themselves they didn't need to then have that time and space. (interview 2)

Peter was sustained in the job, he said, because 'I still love it' (interview 2). In particular, he enjoyed engagement with pupils' learning, 'where you get those magic moments' and 'you know their life is actually better for their experiences in the school that you're in' (interview 2). His irritation, he confessed, was with both teacher and headteacher colleagues who consistently found reasons for not making such things happen for their pupils.

During our final interview, we discussed what Peter understood by spirituality and any spiritual dimension that he felt existed in headship. Peter appeared to see humanity as having a 'core being' which he distinguished from an intellectual being. The spiritual side, the 'personal core being' brought the others together, marrying heart and head. I shared with him the characteristics and capacities that his story had revealed and invited him to debate my claim that they may, taken together, provide an image of the spiritual dimension of his life in and out of school. In response, he drew a distinction between what he called the moral dimension of headship which could include such characteristics and capacities and the spiritual dimension which, for him, related crucially to belief in the divine. So it was possible for moral actions to become spiritual only if they were motivated by a sense of the presence of the divine. Given his changing faith position over the years, Peter was happy to argue that his actions could be seen as having either a moral or spiritual dimension at different points in his career:

So at different parts of my career, you could have had this as the spiritual dimension of my leadership or the moral dimension of my leadership. At this moment in time, I would call it spiritual. (interview 3)

I asked, if this was the case, how Peter understood the concept of spirituality. He responded:

I think spirituality is (lengthy pause) if you are...the way that you are as a person and the way that you actually work and the way that you live your life is based upon, no, not based upon because I think that's not true. I think, can be seen and linked to an understanding of a greater love. So if you believe that there is actually a God and that God loves the world then spirituality is about that love and you doing something about transmitting that love through yourself. (interview 3)

During our second interview I asked Peter about curricular provision and the opportunities that it may offer for pupils' spiritual development. He lamented the pressure for curricular coverage and, so, on time in schools and a consequent lack of space for reflection:

I think that the curriculum is a place where you give children time to reflect and take stock of what they have experienced. Some it would be quite deeply spiritual, some it might not. I'm not worried how much it is; I think it's the opportunity to do that. (interview 2)

Peter offered an example of such experience relating to pupils' writing following a visit to a local forest which had provided an opportunity to 'just sit there and listen and think' (interview 2). He was happy to call such experiences spiritual because 'it gives them a feeling that there is something greater around than just an iPod, play station game' (interview 2). He saw his role as one of legitimising teachers' use of time and space to allow for sufficient time for quality work and experience and of encouraging teachers to become excited by the curriculum and pupils' learning experiences.

I went on to ask Peter how such spirituality could be recognised in Holy Trinity School. He reflected that it would be revealed:

In terms of the way you work with children, the way you work with people; I'd go back, as I say, to the fruits of the Spirit in terms of all those dimensions and the greatest of those being love. (interview 3)

He went on to make a distinction between a love that was rooted in a humanitarian ethic and one that was rooted in religious belief, reflecting the difference between moral and spiritual action that he had made earlier:

Love would overarch it all, degrees of trust which could be the human side; that's humanism as well, isn't it? It's the belief that there is a God with a love that you are emulating or trying to emulate in your own meagre human existence. (interview 3)

He recalled his difficulties with his faith over the years, wondering if his actions had been motivated by a humanitarian ethic of care or the effort to live out God's love through his interactions with others; a debate that remained unresolved:

...that argument has never been fulfilled and it can't be. I'm very comfortable with that because I think it depends where you are in life. (interview 3)

During our final interview we discussed the place of personal prayer in Peter's life. He suggested that he prayed less frequently than he had once done: now he prayed at times of celebration and 'to think about guidance' (interview 3). He made a distinction between reflection and prayer; prayer requiring a sense of the divine:

...it's whether you feel that there is any divine guidance in decision-making or not that separates it between prayer and reflection, I think. (interview 3)

For Peter, prayer was a means of returning to 'your core beliefs' to make decisions or 'to say thank you' (interview 3). He confessed to being able to sit in silence if necessary, but not to

seek it. He talked about 'inner silence' or 'inner space and time' (interview 3) which for him was simply the absence of demands from others and so could be found in listening to the radio.

Peter talked of sharing his personal and family out-of-school experiences with pupils in assembly: 'I think that makes you a real person in front of the children' (interview 2). He revisited the same idea later in the interview sequence:

I think also when you go and visit somewhere, if you can come back and bring in to the school the 'wow' factor about going somewhere and doing something. (interview 3)

He cited the example of a visit to Greece and his passion for Greek myths and legends that he had shared with pupils.

During a field visit following the final interview, I attended a school assembly, which served as a rehearsal for a Mothers' Day assembly, to which parents/carers were invited, to be held the following day. The assembly included drama, sharing of paintings (prepared by younger pupils for presentation to their mothers), dance and singing by both younger and older pupils. Peter sat to one side, smiling and affirming the pupils' performances through his applause and laughter. Peter drew the assembly to a close, reminding the older pupils of the paintings that they had also presented to their mothers at a similar assembly earlier in their school careers; some had been kept over the years. The assembly closed with the 'Our Father'.

In interview 2, Peter talked of his preferred legacy, though his retirement was some time away. He professed to want to leave behind 'people who want to be inspirational; that they actually find that side of the job is what motivates them' (interview 2).

4.5 Rory's story

Rory was headteacher of St Jude's Catholic Primary School, having previously been its deputy head. At the time of the study, he had been head for over twenty years, a period which had included a secondment as acting headteacher of a neighbouring Catholic school, pending the appointment of a permanent head. He had overseen an extensive programme of building and refurbishment during those years.

About sixty per cent of St Jude's pupils were Catholics; the remainder were drawn from other Christian backgrounds. Rory described St Jude's as a 'faith school in the Catholic Christian tradition' (interview 3). He was a committed Catholic and had inspected Catholic denominational education provision in schools within his diocese. He had some regrets that his understanding of differing faith traditions was not as developed as he would like and had

widened his reading accordingly, finding some reassurance that: 'through all generations and through all times and in all places everyone has this search for meaning' (interview 3).

In our first interview, Rory described the development of a strong personal ethic of social justice. During our meetings, he recalled: the lingering hurt of his childhood eleven plus failure and a sense of injustice that had stayed with him; his growing sense that education could improve the life chances of the disadvantaged; his training at a Catholic teacher training college and the opportunities that it provided for him to question some of his traditional beliefs and attitudes in the context of the changes emanating from the Second Vatican Council that were reshaping Catholic practice at that time. These experiences drew him briefly towards the Catholic priesthood, a notion that he eventually rejected in favour of teaching:

I realised that that was too hard a path for me. Teaching was something that I could do.
(interview 1)

However, something of that wish to be with people at key moments of their lives appeared to have stayed with him and he recalled revisiting the idea more recently in a family conversation:

I'd love to do that; I would feel great satisfaction from doing that kind of work. I think that I would be good at welcoming families, good celebrating the joy of a wedding, perhaps saying the appropriate things at a funeral. If there was an easy route, I could do it now.
(interview 2)

Following his initial training and one year of teaching in a primary school, he spent some time overseas, working as a volunteer teacher in a Catholic mission school. He related how, as he returned to England, he sought teaching posts in difficult, challenging inner-city schools; a deliberate continuation of his commitment to the disadvantaged. His encounters with headteachers were mixed. In his view, some fell short of his idea of what leadership in Catholic schools should represent, particularly in their dealings with teaching colleagues. Rory became deputy headteacher of St Jude's. His ambition to lead a Catholic denominational school in his own right led him to apply for headships and he subsequently became head of St Jude's. He appeared to have had few doubts about progressing to headship, having proved himself, as he saw it, as deputy in the school for some years.

His living in and amongst his local Catholic community was central to Rory's realisation of his vision of headship in a Christian faith school. He saw his parish, school and family lives as inseparable, offering a 'unity of purpose' (interview 2). He recognised the difficulties that such proximity may have created for him, but saw it as 'a joy and a strength' (interview 2). During interview 3, he continued:

The notion of working, praying and playing together has been a very strong one. Many colleagues live away from school quite deliberately, but I've always felt very much I

want to be by my school; to me it's not a job – it's part of my life. The relationships, the friendships, the community, the school community, my family are very much bound up, rightly or wrongly. For me, that's always the way it's been. Being friends with colleagues is obviously a double-edged sword: it has its bonuses and it has its downside. It's the way I always felt it worked for me. There's a kind of an attempt to have a humility in all that – people know you for what you are, warts and all. If you're friends with someone, you let your guard down. It's part of my spirituality, allowing my guard to be down. This is my way of running the school. It can be painful, but it works for me. I'm comfortable with that. (interview 3)

Rory's wife had died suddenly following a serious illness a few years before the research study began. He had since remarried. Rory elected to include his experiences of bereavement in our first discussion, describing his emotions and subsequent reflections on his faith. Rory's attitude to loss reflected his Catholic belief; his faith offering consolation:

But that's what our faith is built on; this life will end. Life will end. If you listen to the liturgy, that's what it's all about – it's preparation for that. (interview 2)

Rory admitted to finding it difficult to talk about his bereavement openly in school, but seemed comfortable in talking about death as an inevitable part of the 'cycle of life':

I talk to the children quite often about the cycle of life; we're all going to die – that's part of the cycle. (interview 3)

He was happy that pupils felt able to talk about their own bereavement within the school's community, citing the recent deaths of a mother of two younger pupils and the father of another pupil. It was, he said, 'part of our community experience' (interview 3). During our subsequent interviews, we returned to the various ways in which he felt that bereavement had affected his work with the school's community. He described how he had shared his reactions to the death of his wife with members of his parish as a part of a counselling and support network for people who were in similar situations:

I want to say to people: 'It's horrible now, it's black, it's desperate, but you will come through it. Look at me'. (interview 2)

Rory recounted his reaction to a parent's loss of his wife:

I found myself a few weeks back; one of my dads had lost his wife. She died and he was in tears and I found myself in tears. (interview 1)

He had continued to offer comfort as they met from time to time around the school. Rory's described this as 'the person' responding (interview 1) rather than the headteacher and that his reaction was about:

...following the heart. Just have an honest, open human response to whatever comes your way. (interview 1)

Rory suggested that, following his own loss, his perspective on life had become more immediate, tending to 'search for the richness of today', and recognising that 'everyday is a gift; you really don't know what is coming next' (interview 2). He had shared this with the pupils:

One of the things I say to the children is, 'Make every day count; don't count the days'. (interview 2).

Rory recognised that his family roots have given him strength: 'I've been greatly blessed' (interview 2). Professional relationships, particularly with staff and pupils, provided both joy and pain. Rory described a particularly fractious situation where relationships between a member of staff and other staff had broken down. He felt that he had handled the situation inappropriately and not in accordance with his gospel values. He had chosen, in a staff meeting, to apologise to her for 'not working hard enough to bring about reconciliation between her and her colleagues':

It was meant genuinely, from the heart, as a sincere way of reacting as a Christian to the situation. (interview 2)

His action was met with some bewilderment from his staff, but Rory justified what he had done, at least to himself, by reference to his faith:

...we sometimes have to be fools for Christ. I believe that sometimes...when it's foolish in the eyes of the world, but from the Christian perspective, it's the right thing to do. (interview 2)

He described how he 'had to go beyond the professional', and deal with difficult people as friends: 'even when you felt they were bitterly in the wrong and causing a lot of harm and damage' (interview 2).

Rory reflected further:

I ate some humble pie. I agonised long and hard about this. Now that might have been just me salving my conscience but I felt it was the right thing to do. It wasn't meant to be a management ploy, but it has actually borne fruit. This person has actually softened, matured and there has been a much better atmosphere. (interview 2)

His action seemed to have been affirmed in different ways: it sat comfortably with his gospel values; he appeared to have acted authentically, doing what he felt to be the right things, rather than managing his emotions to achieve his ends and he seemed to have restored harmonious working relationships.

Rory confessed to a 'genuine satisfaction' (interview 2) when he can help, as 'a good listener', to those in his community who find themselves in difficulty, citing the example of a colleague

with family problems. Rory described his joy in working with pupils and has a regular teaching commitment with a younger age group each week. In particular, he recalled meeting former pupils, citing a data analyst and an accountant, who had long since left the school and, in his view, realised their potential: 'there's nothing better' (interview 2).

Rory was a member of a local Catholic headteachers' group: 'a very sort of self-help group...we are good friends' (interview 2). He described how the group had supported a colleague who had had family difficulties and how he had benefited from a visit from a member of the group as changes in responsibilities within his own governing body had caused him some anxiety.

Rory was troubled by what he saw as the misplaced involvement of school governors, though he recognises that a part of his disquiet may be due to his own, somewhat proprietorial, feelings about St Jude's:

Again, I recognise that part of that is because I've been in post a long time in one place. So there is the sense that this is my school. (interview 2)

However, he admitted that he must adjust to the revised arrangements for school governance. Rory had undertaken school management training for experienced heads, aware of the benefits of new perspectives on his work.

The school's ethos and values were outlined in its information to parents. They drew heavily on the school's religious tradition, seeing the school's identity in the opportunities it afforded for 'exploring the mystery' of God and living out the gospel in its community. The school's aims reflected the balance between the school's Catholic traditions and the need to meet national schooling requirements. They included developing enquiring minds and an understanding of the world and humankind's stewardship of it, as well as the development of skills in literacy and numeracy and the promotion of personal, social and moral development.

OfSTED's inspectors had noted the quality of relationships in the school's community, confirming Rory's commitment to the enactment of Catholic values. Rory, in their view, led by example in nurturing an ethos of care based on Christian belief and very positive relationships amongst the school's community. They reported that pupils were encouraged to develop a reflective approach to their work and to significant issues in human life, evident in assemblies and lessons. Diocesan inspectors reported Rory's clear vision for the school and confirmed that the values and ethos contained in its mission statement were reflected in the life and work of the school. They commented that pupils' spiritual development was encouraged through a range of 'prayer and liturgical experiences' and also through displays and other focal points, for example encouraging reflection on the liturgical year. St Jude's policy for

spiritual development described spirituality as unfolding through the nurture of 'the inner life' and rooted in non-material values.

Rory talked about spirituality on a number of occasions and introduced the concept into our interviews much earlier than I had planned. During our final discussion, Rory talked of faith traditions other than Catholicism and affirmed his belief that a sense of the divine or mystery 'not necessarily a God, but something beyond this physical life' (interview 3) may be found outside established religious traditions. At the same time, he concluded that he was happy to be within his Catholic tradition and found his spirituality from within it.

For Rory, spirituality was to do with reflecting on an inner journey. There were three dimensions in this reflection: 'my life; my relationships; respect for the natural world' (interview 3). He continued: 'In all of these things there is an emotional experience – the awe, the reverence for all this.' Spirituality also had moral roots, it was 'about developing a values system' (interview 3). So, although it helped him to celebrate and appreciate his humanity, reflection included 'evaluating my actions against a value system of my choosing' (interview 3). This could be troublesome and Rory described his deep discomfort following what he perceived as a mismatch between the way he had handled staff tensions and his value system: 'I thought I could overcome it and I couldn't' (interview 3).

During our first interview, Rory recalled different encounters and events that had provided opportunities to reflect on and develop his spiritual life: the missionaries that he had met overseas; the volunteer group that he had trained with before he set off and more recently, a Catholic priest who was suffering from a terminal illness and shared his last year with Rory's church community:

Teasing out what was important in life. That was hugely important in terms of my own spirituality. (interview 1)

Rory remarked that he continued to find opportunities for personal reflection, notably in Mass and at more informal moments of occasional prayer perhaps evoked by natural phenomena, though these were limited.

From his Catholic perspective, spiritual development in schools was encouraged through the quality of prayer experiences and opportunities for reflection provided. This involved creating a quiet time as well as 'setting the scene'. The success of all this depended on the 'person and beliefs' of the teacher (interview 3). Rory challenged the notion that the spiritual dimension of primary headship could be discussed separately from personal spirituality. He argued that:

...it's more about the spiritual dimension of the person which reflects on headship and the spirituality within the individual, I think, makes you the kind of head that you are. So I think it would be quite hard to tease out the spiritual dimension of headship as such; you've got to go back to the individual and see how their spirituality impinges on their headship role. (interview 3)

Acts of collective worship at St Jude's were arranged weekly in different configurations; by key stage, whole school or class. During my field visits, I observed Rory as he led whole school and Key Stage 2 assemblies. On each occasion, pupils, with staff, entered the hall quietly to a musical accompaniment. An open Bible and lighted candle on a small table at the front of the hall provided a focal point for them. Rory sat on chair next to the table. Pupils sat in a loose arc facing the table, the older pupils on chairs. Rory led prayers, offering pupils the opportunity to 'talk to God in your own way' and developed the theme for the day (such as not judging by outward appearances alone) through readings related to the liturgical cycle and questions to pupils. Assemblies usually closed with time for reflection on the theme, a hymn, prayers and a communal 'Sign of the Cross'. Assemblies were attended by visitors to the school present for that day, such as work experience students or student teachers.

Towards the end of the research study, I asked Rory about his ability to focus his personal prayer during assemblies, given the many distractions that were inevitably present. He replied that he enjoyed leading assemblies; they were, for him, 'prayerful moments' (interview 3):

So when I ask them to be silent, I can actually lose myself for a few moments and truthfully pray. (interview 3)

I did not attend the annual leavers' assembly, but Rory described it in interview 2 as we discussed what he wanted for his pupils in St Jude's. He cited the guidance for living taken from scripture displayed in the school's hall and described how he shook the hands of the Year 6 pupils who were leaving, asking them to remember 'the message of our school', which was 'to act justly, love tenderly and walk confidently' with God. Pupils then left one by one 'ceremoniously'. For him, that scriptural reference encapsulated 'what it is to be someone coming from this school'.

During our interviews, Rory talked about his feelings as his career drew to a close. He confided that the prospect was: 'actually quite scary' (interview 2). Many of his contemporaries had already retired. He was also aware how much his identity was bound up in headship and remarked that: 'often your occupation can actually identify who you are' (interview 2).

Rory's lengthy service within his community was reflected in a number of ways. During one field visit, an email from a former pupil, who had completed a postgraduate course, brought back memories of a past school trip: 'It's actually rather nice...nice when that happens'. The hand bell that Rory used to signal the start of the school day during one research field visit

was the one that had been used in the school for many years, including his time as head (Field note, 22nd January, 2007).

His period as acting head of a neighbouring school had changed his thinking about the prospect of leaving St Jude's:

...because it made me realise that this is not my school, I am not [St Jude's]; I'm just a steward of this place and I'll be on my way and others will come after me – that helped to put it into perspective. Not getting a great sense of my own importance. (interview 2)

He concluded that he was conscious of 'not wanting to become a lame duck' and that, in a way, he wished that he could start again, 'so I could do it better' (interview 2).

4.6 Terry's story

Terry was head of Rising Mead Community Primary School. At the time of the research study he had been its head for twelve years. He had previously been head of a smaller rural primary school. Terry was not an active or committed member of any faith community, though he had been a 'quite regular' (interview 3) churchgoer and had been confirmed in the Church of England some years before.

Terry had begun his working life in business, but confessed that he felt uncomfortable in a commercial environment and found himself drawn to primary teaching. His subsequent classroom experiences awakened him to the possibilities of a holistic education nourished through a broad curriculum, in particular one that had first-hand encounters with the local environment at its centre. He became a deputy head and was then seconded to a local teacher training provider for one year. According to his account, he felt refreshed by the opportunity to reflect on his pedagogical principles and to share them with student teachers. Terry felt professionally rich, confident in his own practice and so justified in applying for headships 'on a wave of euphoria' (interview 1). His first headship was in a small rural school and, on the basis of his work there, he applied for and was appointed to the headship of Rising Mead School; a very different context.

Rising Mead was a large primary school, situated in the heart of an extensive area of social housing. I was aware of the challenges that the school faced at the time of Terry's appointment through previous professional activities and recognised his account of the extent of the improvement task that lay before him. Terry confessed: 'When I got here and saw the agenda, I really did quake' (interview 1).

He had wondered if he had done the right thing in accepting the post and if he had 'the personal strength to do it' (interview 1). He was nervous, doubting that he could:

...win the respect of a group of people who clearly had not been led as effectively as they would have liked to have been for some time. (interview 3)

Eventually he was convinced and reassured by the confidence that his colleagues and the local authority's officers showed in him.

Terry had recognised that it was going to be 'a long haul' (interview 1). The school was to be reorganised from separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school and Terry saw this as a vehicle for change. He had had to restore and maintain the confidence of his school's wider community, whilst coping with the understandable anxieties of his staff. His imperative had been to improve things for the school's pupils; something that he described in our final interview as a 'moral duty'. Terry's efforts to move the school forward appeared to have been successful. OfSTED's inspectors, in a report published some two years before the research study began, noted that Terry provided very good leadership and cited that as a crucial factor in raising standards in the school.

Terry's vision for Rising Mead appeared to have a sense of social justice at its core, though it and the school's aims and ethos had been shaped in part by what he called the current 'accountability process' as well as his own life experiences which he referred to as his 'past history' (interview 2). In interview 2 he talked of drawing on an 'inner strength', which he went on to identify as his 'vision', to cope with the difficult issues that he had inherited at Rising Mead. He summarised those first thoughts:

Vision. This can be better and I know how it can be better. These children are not getting a fair deal; these teachers are not getting a fair deal. It's not always about ...they have had a raw deal over a period of time for all sorts of reasons. (interview 2)

His first major step had been to improve and extend the school's buildings, to begin to raise morale.

During our first interview, Terry talked of the number of vulnerable pupils in his school and his concern to raise their self-esteem and aspirations. He used drama as an example of how this could be done. Equally, establishing positive relationships across his school's community was crucial for him and he saw the school's provision for pastoral care as an important contributor to its ethos. During interview 3, he reiterated his belief that rich educational experiences, such as watching badgers, looking at stars and listening to story tellers promoted both academic learning and pupils 'as people, their sense of self and where they sit in the fullness of things' (interview 3).

Rising Mead's aims were contained in its mission statement. They reflected Terry's commitment to providing positive learning experiences for pupils and to raising their global awareness. They also indicated that the school sought to promote spiritual awareness and to

provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and values and those of others. OfSTED noted the range of extra curricular experiences provided in the school, reflecting Terry's interest. Similarly, Rising Mead's information for parents/carers referred to its programme of residential visits for pupils, providing opportunities for caving, walking and climbing.

During one field visit to Rising Mead (16th October, 2006), I attended a whole school assembly led by Terry which reiterated the school's ethos of care for others. Terry used a bottle that had been given to him to focus pupils' thoughts on the value that they may attach to things, contrasting monetary value with personal or sentimental value. He provided a short time for reflection on the theme, followed by a brief prayer led by older pupils: 'teach us to value each other, dear Lord'. The assembly continued with a hymn, followed by a dance performance of a Native American song, accompanied by older pupils playing guitars and recorders. Terry closed the assembly with awards to different pupils intended to celebrate their work and their contribution to the school's community.

We discussed the assembly further during interview 3. Terry talked about what was in his mind; his concern that his pupils could be carried away on 'this materialistic tidal wave':

So I suppose an important part of the things that are discussed in assembly is to come back to what are we all like as people? What are the really valuable things that are around us? Do you really need all these materialistic things to be happy? Yes, that was about moral values really. (interview 3)

He talked, too, of revealing something of himself as a person through assemblies to encourage his pupils:

...I probably give of myself quite a bit during assembly as a person. I'm quite prepared to be open and honest with the children. I've brought in objects from home and explained why they are important to me; objects which reflect my interests and things that I do outside school. I think that's important - for children to identify that their headteacher is a person and has aspired to things and is motivated and interested in things hopefully has an impact on them. (interview 3)

During our interviews, Terry talked of the death of his father during his early teenage years and the impact of the loss, personally and professionally. He confessed that he had not really come to terms with his bereavement and that it had left many deep questions, 'Why my father? Why me? What am I doing here?' (interview 3), unanswered. According to Terry's account, bereavement and his grappling with the issues that arose from it had impacted on his headship by increasing his sensitivity to the dilemmas and difficulties faced by members of his school's community:

I think it impacts on headship in terms of recognising people as people and the complexities of (lengthy pause) each person as an individual, the moral dilemmas that

we have to face, the difficulty that life presents sometimes and how, in turn, children have difficulties that they have to face within their families and that can impact on the quality of their concentration, how they behave and perhaps the support they receive... so I guess I'm very sensitive to people and the issues that they face and that has an impact on how you approach behaviour policy, pastoral care aspects of your school... (interview 3).

This in turn had affected his recruitment of staff; he sought that 'caring, nurturing feel' (interview 2) in new staff, particularly for pupils with difficulties in their home lives, that he felt had been brought out in him.

Terry reflected (interview 2) that as he began teaching he was comfortable working with pupils, but less secure in front of adults and how he had grown in confidence over the years. His sense of the responsibilities that he had to parents and children, made more powerful when allied to what he described as his 'social conscience' (interview 3), and his success in discharging them had contributed to his growing self-esteem.

Terry acknowledged that he was not 'the life and soul of the party type person' (interview 3) and recognised the value of colleagues who could bring light conversation to the staffroom more easily than he felt that he could; similarly he was aware of gaps in his own expertise, for example in the education of very young pupils and had recruited staff to provide that understanding.

During our second interview, Terry talked of the breakdown of his marriage and attributed this to the pressures of headship. He talked particularly of his own children:

It's important because I think the pressures of headship, the pressures of the hours that you put in has probably had a negative impact on maintaining a positive relationship with those who are nearest and dearest. I include my children to some extent; that maybe I was putting other people's children ahead of my own at times, going away on residential, all this sort of thing and the energies that you put in, and sometimes the energies that you put in a demanding week at school or a day at school and you come home; you almost don't want to know your own children for a while. (interview 2)

He was hopeful of an eventual reconciliation and in the same interview, he reflected on the importance to him of a stable relationship in coping with the emotional demands of his job. However, the breakdown continued to be a source of frustration and regret. During our last interview, Terry returned to it, wondering if there had been some kind of attempt on his part to use the intensive demands of headship as a means of avoiding his personal problems:

So you immerse yourself in work because there is actually a challenge in another part of your life that you are not facing. So maybe work became a convenience rather than a cause. (interview 3)

He reflected that this experience had had an impact on his headship; that he was sensitive to the competing demands on his colleagues, particularly on those with family responsibilities:

I recognise that the job has got its limits and it is only a job and you can only be effective in the job if you are a settled person. (interview 3)

Terry talked about his staff as source of sustenance for him and OfSTED's inspectors noted the effective support given to Terry by his then deputy and his senior leadership team. He had appointed all but one of them:

Not only have I got colleagues on the staff, I've got friends on the staff. Sometimes that can be an inconvenience, but we do have strong bond as a team; we work hard, but we play hard. (interview 3)

Terry had had to grapple with staffing problems, including potential redundancies and their impact on the school, during his early years at Rising Mead. He found dealing with personnel issues difficult and recognised that this was an aspect of his leadership that he still needed to come to terms with:

I think any personnel issue is always a hard issue. It's fine when everything's going smoothly and it's about fostering and cultivating team spirit, but if something's not going well – a difficult person, or someone who's not responding the same way as everyone else – those are the most difficult things to handle, as well as perhaps pupil issues of a similar nature. (interview 2)

During our second interview, he talked about his preferred leadership style as being that of a 'team builder'. He described his approach as 'being a gradual influence rather than a new broom' (interview 2), winning confidence through open dialogue and his positive recognition of colleagues' work. He recognised that he was a little less certain in holding colleagues to their responsibilities, though he had had to address issues of competence. He maintained that his more studied, measured approach to staffing issues had reaped longer-term benefits and prevented the difficulties that a more direct, confrontational approach may have caused.

Terry networked with other heads and got some reassurance from sharing his difficulties with them. However, he felt that a number of his headteacher colleagues were 'a bit tired and weary' (interview 2) and that their negativity could drag him down: he tried to associate with heads with a more positive outlook.

During our final interview, Terry talked about local authority advisers as sources of support. He felt that the inspectorial role of advisers, as it had developed, had led to less honesty and openness and he felt less able to 'chew the cud', though he had drawn on his authority's headteacher support service during a particularly stressful time and found that beneficial.

Affirmation of his work from other colleagues and the school's community was an additional motivator for him:

...then that does generate a little bit of internal strength to keep going. When you get letters of thanks from parents; when you get cards like that one I showed you from a past pupil; that helps to fuel the inner strength. (interview 3)

Terry was an active and accomplished sportsman. He found his regular Saturday playing commitments helped to sustain him in headship, bringing him 'something totally different from school' (interview 2) and the opportunity to meet people not engaged in teaching.

In our second interview, Terry talked of the difficulties that he had had in trying to combine a regular class teaching commitment with school leadership in his first headship. He had had to reconcile himself to not being the same teacher that he had been and accept reduced contact with pupils, even though, somewhat paradoxically, it was working with pupils that gave him most satisfaction: 'Most of the job satisfaction comes with the time that you're working with the children' (interview 2). At Rising Mead, he visited classrooms regularly, led assemblies and monitored the progress of groups of pupils by working with them, valuing any opportunity to engage with them.

Terry enjoyed headship, but felt that restrictive bureaucracy made the job difficult, in particular pressures on the curriculum that inhibited creativity and an accountability regime that gave prominence to pupils' national assessment scores. He was saddened that what he referred to as the 'more socially important things' had been marginalised by 'the other agenda of raising attainment and things of that sort' (interview 3).

Terry distinguished Christian religious belief, which he claimed had not been a significant motivator for him, from a 'spiritual aspect' (interview 3) to his philosophy that had. He saw spirituality as a common strand in all major religious traditions and defined the concept in relational terms:

...it's to be a good person and to have a fulfilled life and contribute to the society in which you live' ... 'it's about being that person who has a respect for a fellow human beings; is a caring citizen and is aware of the world in which they live; questions the way in which they live and in that sense it's spiritual. (interview 3)

Terry recalled that the death of his father had raised deep questions within him about his own purpose in life. He said that he saw himself as 'quite a spiritual person', recognising, in his phrase, the need to have 'some form of spiritual confidence' (interview 3). He went on to explain that he meant that:

Well, there is something greater ...because I can't come to terms with the fact that, when my time comes to an end, that's the end of me. I've played this one out time after time. There is a link here between the creation of the world and my place in it I guess. (interview 3)

He confessed to having spiritual experiences, 'in terms of quiet moments where I do have my quiet questions to ask; quiet personal discussions in my mind...' (interview 3). Earlier he had talked of spirituality in terms of a relationship with and a response to the natural world as well as to others; he linked this to his educational beliefs:

I'm very much a spiritual person in terms of the awe and wonder of the earth that we live on. And I think that has translated itself in my philosophy towards education that links in with appreciation of the world around us and first-hand learning. So there is a thread there; let's have a look at this world that we live in, your role in it and what you can do to make it a better place as a person and in terms of looking after this environment we have. (interview 2)

He cited a number of examples of what he called the 'Wow' factor in his encounters with natural phenomena during field visits with pupils. This perspective, according to Terry, had informed his decisions on staff appointments. In particular, applicants were required to demonstrate that they subscribed to a broad, holistic view of 'what education is all about' (interview 2) and a commitment to providing first-hand learning experiences. He suggested that spirituality would be found in the network of relationships across the school's community as well as 'hidden within the curriculum' (interview 3). It would be seen in 'care and compassion' (interview 3) particularly in pupils' growing sense of care for the environment and for each other. He cited the school's involvement in work for charity as an example of the latter.

To augment his narrative, Terry provided copies of newspaper articles and letters from pupils about to leave the school that offer further clues to the impact that Terry's understanding of spirituality, prompted by his response to the natural world, had left on Rising Mead. His insistence on the primacy of first-hand experiences in encouraging pupils to wonder at the world around them and to explore their own feelings could be discerned through the pupils' letters. One pupil had written to thank him for 'school trips', for 'having real actors in the school to teach us how to act' and 'letting us learn about some of the worldwide things that happen. I now know so much more about the world than I ever did'. A local newspaper had reported on arts activities in the school, using local artists to work with pupils and on the school's role in clearing a local river, as part of a rivers and environment project.

He drew upon his own spiritual promptings in sharing the natural world with pupils in school:

...I have done things in assemblies; I guess when the seasons are coming round and part of the cycle of assemblies is to refer to the changing seasons and so forth. So, yes, I'll bring in artefacts I've gathered and draw children's attention to the awe and wonder of the world out there, hum, yes, I've done that. I've brought things back from the seashore and explored that; maybe not necessarily in assembly, but maybe as a talking point in the classroom; constant inspiration from the world around us. (interview 2)

Terry appeared to have less time than he would have liked for personal reflection. In his quiet moments, he confessed to thinking about colleagues and how to move his school forward: 'I try to empty my head of school, really, to be honest but inevitably it crops up' (interview 2).

Terry felt that he has 'done a lot for this school' (interview 2), though he readily acknowledged the support he has received from the school's community:

When we had the new buildings and there was a lot of discussion about how we have moved over a period of time. People were saying, you know, that this is down to you and the fight that you put in to get it. So there are times when you do get opportunity to reflect back and think, well, OK, I was responsible for that, but I don't, I'm not taking personal glory here, because... but you are orchestrating it. (interview 2)

Terry would like to have developed a nursery facility at Rising Mead before he left and felt that such provision would have a positive impact in the locality. He reflected on how he wanted to leave headship:

I guess I do not want under any circumstances to be one of these people that goes out under any sort of cloud. You know, I go under and I go out under stress, those sorts of things. I couldn't bear for that to happen after all the years of effort and drive – that would be a great disappointment to me if that were to happen. Sadly, I think that happens to so many colleagues. I'm very conscious of that so I think to go into retirement with some sort of satisfaction, some sort of high, is going to mean a lot more in terms of how you enjoy your retirement. (interview 2)

4.7 Dave's story

At the time of the research study, Dave had been the headteacher of Shore Close Primary School for about nine years, having previously been head of a smaller rural primary school. Shore Close was situated a short distance from a local beach and its coastal environment featured in the school's life in a variety of ways. Dave was not committed to any faith tradition and was sceptical about the existence of what he called a 'more special being' (interview 3b). However, he respected those who did have a religious faith, something he saw as offering believers 'an inner comfort with themselves' (interview 1).

Dave had grown up and attended school in a city suburb. When he was in his mid-teens, his father had changed employment and Dave's family had relocated to a more rural area. Dave had chosen to remain behind, but continued to have a close relationship with his family, particularly his mother. He reflected:

When they made the decision to move it was the right one for them, no doubt about it, it was the right one for them. Looking back I think it was the right one for me. I grew up so much in the ensuing eighteen months. (interview 1)

A short time later, Dave had left school and begun his working life in an office. Though he confessed to feeling some homesickness, Dave felt that the episode had developed his life skills and personal confidence:

... looking back it was about the self-reliance, at the time it gave me confidence; a confidence in me being able to deal with things on my own. I still have the safety of that in my mind. (interview 1)

Dave recalled that the decision of an office colleague to become a teacher had set him thinking about a similar change of direction. Subsequently, he had trained as a secondary phase teacher. However, his first teaching post had been in a middle school and he had moved to the primary phase later in his career. During our first interview, he outlined his early thoughts on headship and the ambiguities that surrounded the role in the late 1970s. His first head worked with pupils each day for a short time to provide staff with some non-contact time but Dave mused: 'He didn't do anything during the rest of the day. What did he do?' (interview 1).

That head had retired. Dave had difficulties with his successor, whom he 'didn't get on with' and who 'questioned my professional practice' (interview 1), but, he admitted, taught him a lot. These professional pressures, coupled with the demands of a new family, appeared to have provoked a severe panic attack in him. Dave recalled the event in some detail, describing how: he had felt 'all hot and clammy'; how he had left his classroom and gone to the cloakroom alongside the head's office to cool his face against its tiled walls; how he had felt he was going to collapse and knocked on the head's door, telling her that he was ill. Her response, according to Dave, had been dismissive: '...and she was with someone, and she said, 'What do you expect me to do about it? I'm busy' (interview 1).

Later, Dave reflected on the lack of support from that head, contrasting that with his own more sensitive reaction to staff distress. He had not returned to school for three months. He confessed that his health improved only when he understood that the solution lay within himself, making him realise how 'powerful your inner self is' (interview 1). Dave had brought that experience to his work at Shore Close:

That's been hugely useful in my job that I do now, in that when people are stressed, when people are having difficulties, I've been there, and I've been able to share those experiences with them. I've said, 'Look, there's nothing physically wrong with you, but I know exactly how you feel'. (interview 1)

The episode, according to his narrative, had made him stronger personally and professionally, though his professional confidence had remained fragile. He attributed this to the lack of a coherent system of teacher appraisal at that time. He had remained uncertain, diffident and insecure in his own teaching capabilities.

Dave had moved on to another teaching post, gradually becoming more dissatisfied with his chosen career and the calibre and quality of the headteachers with whom he had worked. He referred again in the same interview to the lack of any appraisal of his work and the disillusion that it had created in him: 'I did a good job, I thought, but nobody ever told me I did a good job' (interview 1). After eleven years of teaching he was ready to leave the profession. Eventually, Dave had found a primary teaching post near to his parents. Importantly, he also found a head who, he said: 'changed my life professionally' (interview 1), offering him support and encouragement to develop his career. He summed up: 'Got a job, started work, had an appraisal of my work within a month of starting' (interview 1). Dave attended various courses. He recalled the change in his professional understanding, for example about teaching mathematics, and the encouragement to apply for deputy headships that he had been given. Eventually, Dave had been appointed to the headship of a small village school and then of Shore Close.

Dave had become a highly respected head locally and regionally. OfSTED's inspectors, about two years before our interviews, had described him as a very effective leader. He acted as a mentor to newly appointed heads and led development training for headteachers.

Dave viewed school leadership as a highly relational activity:

It is all about people. It's about working with people and it's about the way in which you treat people, be they big, be they small, be they part of your community, be they external monitors, OfSTED and people like that. It is about getting on with people and I'm sure that if you, if we look at schools that have got issues over standards and things like that we will find that we have frightened heads, heads that don't have people skills – a lot of that is the cause. (interview 3b)

My field notes contained a number of examples of Dave's easy, positive interactions with different members of the school's community. He greeted a younger pupil arriving at school dressed as a pirate in preparation for a Pirates' Day at the beach: 'Morning Pirate Pete' (Field note, 18th July, 2006), provoking mutual smiles. But my notes also recorded his comforting the parent of a pupil who was to have an operation the following day as they met outside his office, 'We'll be thinking of you' (Field note, 10th October, 2006).

Dave was clear that professional growth in headship is not solely a matter of accumulating experience as a head, of doing the job, but 'experience of people – experience of relationships' (interview 3). For this reason, he was highly sceptical of current competence-based training for headship largely because in his view, it neglected what he called 'people skills': 'knowing when to push, knowing when to stand back, when to put an arm round' (interview 1).

An essential prerequisite for successful headship, Dave argued, was good classroom experience. Such experience was vital, in his view, to any understanding of the pressures that impact on teachers' lives and so to informed school leaders' decision-making:

The important thing is, if you've been successful you won't want people to do something that you're not capable of yourself. (interview 2)

Dave suggested that over his years of headship he had become 'a leader rather than a manager' (interview 1). In his first headship, he recalled that he had taken on a number of roles, perhaps to prove himself. He described himself as a manager, dealing directly with budgets, staff and curriculum. He drew a distinction between that role and leadership. The 'strength of leadership' as he saw it (interview 1) involved the distribution of responsibilities to colleagues.

However, in spite of his preference for shared leadership, Dave argued that there were critical, highly demanding circumstances that arose in schools in which the head must lead the school's community directly. For him: '...leadership is being able to cope when the Exocet lands on your lap. They say, 'Cor, that's your pigeon' (interview 2).

He described his own response to the death of a pupil: 'I felt the need to be strong; I needed to lead' (interview 3). This, in his view, distinguished headship from deputy headship, where 'you can deflect' (interview 2). He remarked that such moments reminded him of the 'huge power and impact' (interview 3) that he could have within the school's community.

Though he did not have a religious faith, Dave was clear that he wanted what he called Christian values to inform the work of the school and its community. These he defined as:

I think it's about valuing people. It's about tolerance; it's about forgiving; it's about leading; it's about building. All of those things I think are possibly Christian values. But I think they are highly appropriate for what we do. (interview 3)

Shore Close's aims were detailed in its information for parents/carers. They reflected the importance Dave attached to nurturing positive relationships amongst all members of the school's community as well as the school's location, referring to respect for the environment and its sustainability. Pupils were also encouraged to respect the values, attitudes and beliefs of others and consider their own 'thoughtfully'.

OfSTED's report had confirmed that the school had a strong ethos of care and made good use of its location to enrich the curriculum. Similarly, inspectors had reported that pupils respected the feelings and beliefs of others and that they were given time to reflect on these in assemblies and classroom. My field notes recorded Dave encouraging pupils' quiet thinking

on the theme of 'overcoming disappointment' during one act of collective worship (Field note, 18th July, 2006).

Dave appeared to draw support from a number of sources. He kept in close touch with a headteacher colleague and with his former deputy head, sharing personal experiences and professional advice. Recent OfSTED inspectors' reports appeared to provide confirmation not only of the quality of teaching and learning at Shore Close, but affirmation for Dave of his own educational vision and values. According to Dave's narrative, his more liberating style of leadership contrasted markedly with the 'charismatic yet dictatorial' (interview 1) style of his predecessor at Shore Close. He had met some resistance as he had taken up his post, particularly from staff that were, in his view, comfortable with their existing practice. An OfSTED inspection shortly after his appointment had justified his stance. He recalled:

They also said the head was a good leader and manager. For the first time an outside agency, someone from outside said, 'Gosh! You're doing a good job' ... 'suddenly I'd grown, I'd grown professionally and that gave me the energy, it also gave me permission to change things here, which is what needed to happen...' (interview 1)

That is not to say that he was convinced by the OfSTED inspection regime. He was clear that he used it as a source of external 'professional affirmation' (interview 3), because, at least at that time, it was the only organisation that could provide that.

Dave was motivated particularly by his contacts with pupils. For example, he had asked younger pupils who had written their names for the first time to 'blu-tack' their writing to his office door, so that he could share these first steps with them (Field note, 18th July, 2006). He confessed: 'It's those moments that make the job so worthwhile' (interview 2). Letters and cards from past parents and pupils, commenting very positively on the work of the school and their experiences of it were also a source of professional sustenance for him (informal conversation, Field note, 18th July, 2006). Dave found what he considered to be unnecessary outside intervention into the work of schools particularly irksome, citing a dispute over a substantial amount of his school's budget that had been reclaimed by his local authority; in his view, quite unjustifiably.

During our final interview Dave described how he had dealt with an underperforming teacher. The teacher was very experienced and well respected in the local community. Dave had found the process difficult, but had been sustained by what he saw as the need to provide the best learning experience for the pupils in his school. Dave reflected:

Now I made a difference to that person's life: he could have jogged along, but it wasn't good enough for these youngsters. I don't feel any sense of pride in what I did; professionally it was the right thing to do. When I look at the faces that I had on the occasions that we met; very tough. (interview 3)

During a field visit to Shore Close, I attended a whole school assembly (18th July, 2006) that Dave led. Before it began, Dave had asked a younger pupil to show her 'Race for Life' participation medal to the other pupils. Dave had explained that she had taken part in 'The Race for Life', a sponsored three mile run intended to raise funds for cancer research; it had taken place locally on the day before my observation. She displayed her medal with obvious delight to warm applause and congratulations.

During the interview that followed, Dave referred to the assembly as he talked about his own view of headship and the negative impact of the way that he felt that he had been treated by the heads that he had worked with early in his career. He talked of the need to value individuals, explaining that the pupil's father had died from cancer and that his aim in celebrating her run with the school's community was to make her feel 'special' (interview 1). In turn, the pupil's run had recalled memories of his mother's death that moved him to tears as he spoke. Dave's daughter had also taken part in the 'Race for Life', wearing his mother's name.

During our second interview, Dave talked about the unexpected death of an older pupil. He had been notified of the death, by a telephone call from the pupil's family, early one morning as staff and pupils were beginning to arrive at school. He described how he had felt unprepared for the situation – he had not had to deal with the death of a pupil before - and his dilemmas and difficulties as he broke the news to staff and then to that morning's assembly:

...Something inside you that allows you to speak with a strong voice at times of great emotion... I just had five or ten minutes ...just talking about him...what we'd remember him by. It was very personal. (interview 2)

Dave went on to describe how the older pupils had gone to the beach with him that day and how they had built the pupil's name in stones; how each pupil had collected a stone and thrown it into the sea, shouting the pupil's name. He had recalled his thoughts that evening; the experience making him confront what was important in schooling:

...[name] had sat his SATS a month before. Were his SATS tests of any interest to him now? Waste of time!' (interview 2)

Dave had been asked to speak at the pupil's funeral, which he did with some trepidation but regarded as 'an honour, a privilege' (interview 2). A memorial bench was to be placed in the school's grounds some time later (Field note, 18th July, 2006). We discussed a second death of a pupil in school in interview 3b. Unlike the loss of the first pupil, the second death had been expected, but Dave was not entirely satisfied with the way in which the loss had been dealt with in school. He had attempted, unsuccessfully, to control the manner in which the news of the loss had been passed to the school's community.

On both occasions, he appeared to perceive his principal leadership role to be that of managing the school community's emotional reactions. He described his reaction to the first unexpected bereavement:

When I received that phone call, I needed to be the person that told people what had happened; I needed to make sure that the school stayed calm, we didn't need hysteria. We needed to be calm and peaceful. (interview 3)

Dave had subsequently agreed a procedure for handling pupil death with his staff, or at least for informing the school's community of such an event.

During our final interview Dave described a 'tradition' that marked their transition from primary to secondary schooling for Year 6 pupils, again returning to the seashore at a significant moment in the life of the school:

We've got a thing on the last day of term. We go down to the beach with the youngsters who are leaving; it's a tradition. They dive in the sea in their school uniform. And we go down there with them – I have to say we were dressed suitably. And we went down there with them and what these holiday makers must have thought, all these children and adults in the sea and there's great enjoyment. It crystallises a lot of what we stand for. (interview 3)

Dave maintained that he could leave school behind, though there were particular pressure points during the year when he had to work at home. When he had time to reflect, he tended to look forward to what he may be doing in the future, particularly as retirement approached. His moments of deeper reflection appeared to be associated with bereavement. The sudden death of a pupil seemed to have raised questions about justice and fairness in him. That death and the loss of his mother had brought him to ask bigger questions:

I have asked those questions; I have considered those questions and thought, 'OK, we're here for a number of years and we are a very small speck in time. Is there anything out there? I'm beginning to think and become more hardened in my views that there isn't. (interview 3b)

During our final interview, Dave talked of what a spiritual dimension in headship meant to him:

Dave: *There's something, an inner strength upon which you draw. Now I don't know what that is. You can't put your finger on it; you can't train it. It's about you. How you deal with certain things, how you react to things. I suppose it's what makes you you. Whether that's a spiritual dimension or not, I don't know. It's the individuality that enables you to try and do what you do well; to have that pride in what you do.*

Stephen: *That's what you would call the spiritual dimension in headship?*

Dave: *Yes; it's that individuality that you bring to it; that individual slant to it.*

As we moved to discuss how Dave wished to describe spirituality itself, he recalled seeing his late mother, shortly after her death. He described how he had felt that 'something like the sort of life had been extinguished, a flame had gone' (interview 3). Her spirit was what, for him, made her his mother. So spirituality was: 'the bit that makes you, you and all you stand for and all that you believe in' (interview 3). Such spirituality could be concealed. It was inside you and 'grows as you grow' (interview 3). It offered sustenance through difficult times and enabled each person to emerge better for those experiences, more able to cope with life's problems.

He described how the spiritual dimension may be found in school. Most of his emphasis was on relationships: 'the way in which we react with each other' (interview 3). In the end though, for Dave, it remained ambiguous, something to be felt:

So, I don't know what it is; you come into a school and you can feel a school. I'd be proud to take anybody round my school at any time; you feel it. (interview 3)

During our first interview, I had asked Dave what he would like to leave behind; what his legacy might be. He had described a school where pupils were actively involved in their learning and had the skills to succeed as independent learners. I had probed his view of what the purpose of education may be. He responded:

I think it's to allow people to grow up in a world where they are able to work together, where they are able to understand each other, where they are able to contribute to a society in a positive way, where they are able to fulfil their potential. (interview 1)

Dave enjoyed headship, but had begun to wonder about his future as retirement approached and was considering the idea of consultancy. He felt professionally fulfilled, but commented that the progress that the school had made had been 'hard work' (interview 2).

4.8 Summary

The stories provide important, nuanced insights into the dense interplay of emotions, relationships and religious and nonreligious promptings at work in each head's life and allow some comparisons to be made and contrasts drawn between individual headteachers. However, to provide a more complete response to the research questions given in Chapter 1, and to discern the characteristics of the spiritual dimension more comprehensively, it is necessary to explore the broad commonalities and differences that emerged through the stories. These are constructed and conceived as themes and analysed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Research findings: identified themes

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, research findings from interview data, observations and documentation are presented as a series of themes, each emerging from the stories given in Chapter 4. In this way, it is intended to provide an alternative reading of the data, permitting a deeper analysis and an enriched understanding of spirituality in its association with school leadership. Each theme distinguishes those shared aspects of their complex stories through which each head's spiritual promptings, their perceptions of them and their responses to them could be discerned, for example through the professional values and beliefs that they revealed. The themes are intended to shed further light on the spiritual dimension and allow some further comparisons to be made or contrasts to be drawn between different heads. They are presented discretely to facilitate scrutiny and analysis, but distinctions of this kind are inevitably permeable and fluid, reflecting the ambiguous nature of spirituality itself. The broad, identified themes are:

1. professional beliefs and values;
2. relationships;
3. an implicit spirituality;
4. a spirituality that is more explicit; and
5. a religiously-based spirituality.

The themes are ordered in this way to provide some coherence to the emerging image of the spiritual dimension: Theme 1 explores the beliefs and values (including those that may be considered spiritual) that the heads' brought to teaching and headship; Theme 2 investigates the spiritual promptings arising from the complex pattern of relationships surrounding the day-to-day practice of headship and Themes 3, 4 and 5 address the spiritual dimension more directly, including its nonreligious and religious roots, as it is discerned from the range of data.

5.2 Professional beliefs and values

This section identifies those aspects of the research data, particularly from each series of interviews, that bring the different sets of beliefs and values that may be called the heads' professional beliefs and values most easily to light. Beliefs and values are considered together because that more accurately reflects the undifferentiated way in which the heads chose to talk about those convictions that informed their choices and guided them in their professional work.

5.2.1 *Entering teaching and taking up headship*

The heads' accounts of their career paths were striking in their apparent serendipity. A coherent career plan or even a strong, longstanding ambition to become a head was difficult to discern, except perhaps in the case of Peter. Their thoughts of becoming heads seem to have been stimulated mainly by expressions of confidence and encouragement from respected senior colleagues and shaped by external events. They appeared to take up headship with an established set of beliefs, values and understandings relating to education, its purposes and the ways in which headship could be conducted, formed, both positively and negatively, through their various contacts with serving heads.

For Margaret, progression to headship seemed to be a part of her response to God's call as well as being, in itself, an important means of sustaining her relationship with God (Hartnett and Kline, 2005). According to her narrative, Margaret's headship appeared to be a means of honouring the particular gifts given to her. She referred to her abilities as a teacher and head as a 'gifting' (interview 3). In turn, this same concept seemed to underpin her school community's core belief that each child was a unique gift from God and so the purpose of schooling was to nurture and develop the 'uniqueness' of that child (All Saints' information brochure).

Rory saw progression to headship as a way of realising his own view of what a Catholic faith school could be. For him, headship was bound up with service to his Catholic faith and his faith community. He conceptualised the relationship between church, school and home as a triangular one, created to nurture pupils' beliefs and values; a long-standing and familiar notion within the Catholic tradition. This was reflected in his narrative as he talked of teaching and modelling gospel values to pupils and adults as a key dimension of his vision for St Jude's. In addition, he claimed to have a strong sense of social justice, formed in part through his own disappointment at failing his own secondary selection examination, commenting that education had 'a big part to play' (interview 1) in securing such justice.

Peter linked his Christian faith and what seemed to be a similar egalitarian view of social justice promoted through schooling, seeing religion and social concern working in synergy. His comments reflect Benn's (1980) argument that both secular humanists and Christians are, in practice, committed to pursuing a code of human ethics 'identical in application' (p.28) to the moral imperatives found in Biblical teaching and the teachings of Jesus and were reflected in Peter's thoughts on spirituality. In our final conversation, we discussed those influences that had encouraged him to enter teaching and that now determined his priorities as a head:

...faith and a socialist background. I don't see any conflict there; I know some people would. I entered education believing that every child has a right to everything we can offer and we should not be selective in how we approach that. (interview 3)

During our first interview, Bernadette described her hopes for her pupils, referring to her own sense of social justice that had informed her teaching life:

My first degree is in sociology... I think when I came into education; I was also into social engineering. I now know that that is not the purpose of education. There's a little bit of that there. Education for me extended my horizons, gave me opportunities that my parents never had. I want that for the children. (interview 1)

Similarly, Terry gave reasons of social justice and fairness as his motivation for taking on the headship of his second school. Its pupils and staff were not getting, as he saw it, 'a fair deal' (interview 2).

Bernadette returned to her somewhat egalitarian perspective on 'social justice' in our final interview, linking it to giving pupils 'autonomy', providing opportunities for them to acquire 'life skills', that is, the 'skills to make choices' and to 'operate independently' (interview 3), relating this to her school's agenda for raising standards in teaching and learning. At the time of the research study, she was beginning to develop initiatives in promoting classroom democracy for this reason.

Bernadette and Peter both talked of strong socialist influences in their lives and both had Christian religious backgrounds. What they appeared to have in mind was adherence to ideals and ideas of equality and opportunity. Similar ideals were also expressed by Dave as 'making a difference for the better' (interview 3) to the lives of the schools' community and included the notion of schooling as an empowering process, enabling pupils to learn in a broad sense and to: '...take life's experiences and work with them to make it better for them' (interview 3). Terry elaborated and extended the idea of personal betterment to encompass his belief that schooling was about encouraging pupils to make the world a better place and to care for the environment. Overall, the heads' beliefs and values relating to the purposes of education were not primarily instrumental but moral and social, rooted in the promotion of their pupils' wellbeing.

5.2.2 The primacy of pupils' wellbeing

A persistent assertion running through the heads' narratives was the primacy given to pupils' wellbeing. Both Dave and Bernadette voiced their agreement with the principles of care and education that underscore the *Every Child Matters* agenda and its outcomes (DfES, 2003). Bernadette in particular supported what she perceived to be its holistic, multi-agency perspective on provision for young pupils: '...that's very much the *Every Child Matters* agenda, which I fully take on' (interview 2). Peter talked about a school 'which is not doing its

job properly' as one where the teaching staff are 'actually working for themselves not for the children' (interview 3). For him, giving of oneself to the pupils is a part of the 'professional vocation' (interview 3) of teaching. He seemed to interpret vocation in terms of a life dedicated to the care and service of others, particularly to pupils, but not necessarily in response to a divine calling.

Bernadette, like Margaret, regarded each pupil as unique, to be respected for 'who they are' (interview 3). Bernadette went on to discuss the idea that educational provision itself should be formed around pupils' needs. She saw the development of independent learning skills or life management skills (as did other heads) as a crucial means of preparing pupils for an unknown future, as well as raising current standards of teaching and learning. Curricular guidance or policy, in her view, was to be adapted to the needs of the pupil:

Yes, that we have to - within what we're doing - always see the child, the individual child. (interview 3)

5.2.3 Schools' aims: beliefs and values

Each school's aims were included within information brochures provided to parents or carers seeking to register a pupil. Not surprisingly, these aims emphasised the nurture of: respect and care for members of the school's community; tolerance; independence; curiosity; pupils' abilities as learners and care for the environment. Statements of aims also reflected national curricular requirements and guidance in statements relating to pupils' access to a broad curriculum or to the full entitlement of the National Curriculum. Faith schools' aims reflected their Christian traditions, stating an intention to model gospel values or to provide a Christian ethos. Heads' particular professional beliefs and values, revealed through their narratives, were also present. St Jude's aims, for example, included its intention that pupils should learn about human aspirations for social justice, reflecting Rory's comments. Similarly, Rising Mead's aims mirrored Terry's belief in nurturing responsible citizens and pupils who cared about the world in which they lived.

These public statements of aims melded heads' educational beliefs and values with external requirements, the sort of 'pragmatic compromise' (Bottery, 2004, p.199) that characterises much contemporary school leadership practice. However, the aims continued to emphasise the development of moral values in pupils, such as consideration for others or the acceptance of personal responsibility. In their narratives, heads persistently argued that schooling itself was a legitimate site for the nurture of what Beck (1990, p.148) calls 'social values'. Dave thought education was about enabling pupils to learn to work together, to understand each other and 'to contribute to society in a positive way' (interview 1). Rory commented that education was about more than creating 'winners' (interview 1). For him it was to do with:

Working collaboratively, rather than being in competition. Yes, giving the children the chance to be the best that they can be, but not competing at all costs. (interview 1)

The moral values described in the heads' narratives and the school's aims are part of a system of values that, taken together, promote the 'good life' (Beck, 1990, p.147) and which includes such social values. So, to continue Beck's (1990) point, the cultivation of moral and social values was crucial because, in order to develop as the independent, critical learners that the heads wanted to encourage, it was important that pupils formed positive relationships with others and functioned comfortably within the school's community.

5.2.4 Beliefs and values that inform heads' decision-making

Beliefs and values appeared to shape the heads' perceptions of the situations that they confronted, what Fraser (2009, p.28) calls the 'horizon of significance', and were reflected in the choices that they made. Their narratives suggested that problematic questions about the best course of action to take raised complex value judgements for them. Peter argued that he chose to structure his presentation on leadership and spirituality to his diocesan colleagues around faith school leaders' decision-making because, in his view, the process could be uncomfortable and perhaps illuminate a difficult clash of values, for example relating to teaching appointments or teachers' requests for leave of absence.

The primacy that heads gave to pupils' care and wellbeing in talking about their educational beliefs and values was reflected in their decision-making as school leaders. Dave commented:

...I've never made a decision that would make my life easier to the detriment of the youngsters. (interview 3)

Their concern for pupils and staff manifested itself in different ways. Bernadette, for example, intervened, with only partial success, in a bitter row between groups of parents. She had decided to become involved because the conflict 'wasn't going away' (interview 2). With some trepidation, Bernadette stepped beyond what some would consider to be the boundaries circumscribing professional involvement (Hargreaves, 2001) that she described as her 'remit' (interview 2), because of what she saw as her responsibility to her younger pupils and her concerns about the negative effects that a violent public dispute could have on them.

All of the heads reported their anxieties in dealing with underperforming members of staff, confirming a consistent finding from investigations of the experience of headship (Chaplain, 2001; NCSL, 2007). Margaret called it 'the worst one' (interview 2) and Rory described dealing with disruptive colleagues as 'the most difficult times' (interview 2). However, deciding how to deal with underperformance seemed to create a dilemma: heads were torn between

their concerns for pupils' progress and the effects of their actions on the teacher concerned. Matters were made even more difficult for Dave and Margaret because dealing with incompetence for them involved teachers who were well-known and liked within their schools' small, local communities.

What appeared to sustain all the heads through these events was a recurring sense that every pupil had a right to positive learning experiences, their own professional standards and their vision for their schools. Margaret summed up:

There is advice, but ultimately, you're the one who's got to pull the plug or say the hard thing. That's hard, especially in village schools; people are well-known. The thing that kept me going through that was the conviction that children deserved better. (interview 2)

Peter referred to his own somewhat critical perspective on his Christian faith. His questioning of his own religious beliefs, he argued, not only clarified his beliefs and values, but gave him a framework for his own decision-making processes: '...not that it gives you answers, but that it makes you ask the questions' (interview 3). Like Dave and Margaret, he reflected on his decision to instigate incompetence procedures (ongoing at the time of our interviews) against an underperforming teacher:

You've got to look at the human side of it all – at the person's point of view. And you look at the children's point of view: when tough decisions come along, you have got to close your eyes and think of the children ... when it comes down to it, I'm going to have to make probably a very difficult decision. I will have done it from another person's perspective – how is it going to affect them as well as making a decision which is right for the school? Faith, that comes into it – to ensure that you are doing it for the right personal reasons. (interview 3)

Decisions were sometimes difficult for other reasons. As he discussed dealing with difficult staff, Terry confessed that he was 'not able to make hard decisions easily' (interview 1), feeling that his natural tendency was to be 'a nurturer', preferring to work through guidance rather than prescription. Terry recognised with some frankness that he needed to be a little more demanding but understood, conversely, that, handled inappropriately and without cognisance of each individual's context, such an approach could be unproductive. For him, personnel problems had provoked reflection about himself and his professional growth reflecting the findings of Maslin-Ostrowski and Ackerman's (2000) study of the effects of distressing events on school leaders in the United States. He revealed that he had pondered about:

...the way that I am as a person and the way that I am as a leader and to recognise there are certain qualities that I need to be more conscious of. (interview 2)

5.2.5 Headteachers' beliefs and values: the vision for the school

During the research study, Bernadette, Terry, Rory and Margaret each referred in different ways to their vision for their schools, which included beliefs and values, and helped them to communicate a general 'sense of direction for the school' (Day et al., 2000, p.41). The vision appeared to take the form, not just of a strategic plan, but of a story of what the school's community could become; what Beare et al. (1989, p.99) call a 'mental picture of a preferred future.' It represented and symbolised things that mattered to the heads and the school's community and, as such, touched aspirations, attitudes and moral purposes (Sergiovanni, 2001).

Bernadette described her vision for St Mary's as one of early years' provision rooted in family and community involvement and had worked for many years to bring it to fruition. Terry's picture for Rising Mead was one of school improvement, including remodelled buildings and eventually, extended nursery provision, which he saw as making a significant difference for the better in a socially disadvantaged area. Margaret portrayed her vision as the nurture and sustenance of a community imbued with the relational values inherent in Corinthians 1 (13. 4-8). Realisation of the vision appeared to be a sustaining force in their working lives.

Occasionally the moral purposes and values inherent in the vision were disregarded by members of the community, with painful effects for the heads. Bernadette, for example, described how a pupil with learning difficulties had been humiliated by a teacher, who had since left the school:

I was the head...with all that we had talked about the school ethos...it was devastating.
(interview 1)

Bernadette reflected on the power that teachers had in their own classrooms, recognising that the fulfilment of her vision for St Mary's depended not just on herself, but could be hindered or helped by the extent to which it became the shared vision of her community (Sergiovanni, 2001). Bernadette seemed to expect her colleagues to model or exemplify the moral purposes and values that St Mary's claimed to promote and, in turn, to believe that this experience would nurture social and moral virtues in her pupils (Noddings and Slote, 2003). On each count, she seemed to feel let down; her purposes and values disregarded.

5.2.6 Summary

The heads' narratives suggested that their beliefs and values were formed by a range of influences including religious faith, education, life-changing episodes and events which provoked renewed self-awareness and nurtured personal relationships with significant individuals. The research study was not designed to investigate accommodations or

adjustments in their beliefs and values over the period of the heads' careers. However, both Margaret and Rory seemed conflicted by values that were imposed on their leadership from outside, for example through approaches to ensuring school attendance or expectations of managerial behaviour.

Each of the heads appeared to be motivated primarily by those aspects of the job which they considered to be central to their school leadership: working with pupils and staff and making a positive difference to their lives. Their beliefs and values were predominantly moral, that is, centred on the welfare of their schools' communities, with primacy given to that of their pupils. Two main subsets appeared to make up this set of beliefs and values. These were:

- social justice (education was viewed as means of promoting an egalitarian social justice, nurturing personal aspiration and improvement). The heads consistently voiced their dislike of secondary phase selection procedures and their support for inclusive processes and equal opportunities; and
- care for the wellbeing of each member of the school's community, particularly for pupils, often expressed as doing 'what is best' for pupils.

These beliefs and values were reflected in school's aims which emphasised the social values needed to enable the heads' educational beliefs and values to be realised.

5.3 Relationships and Spirituality

Though relationships with members of their schools' communities featured most prominently, the research data suggested that the heads were conscious of other forms of relationship, especially with the divine, even when they were not committed or consistent believers. In addition, Terry seemed conscious of a relationship with the natural world which appeared to be a significant source of his spirituality.

This section examines headteachers' multiple relationships and the extent and nature of any formative impact that they may have on a spiritual dimension in their lives. Emphasis is given to heads' relationships with the members of their schools' communities, reflecting the balance emerging from the range of data. A more detailed consideration of their consciousness of the divine, the emotions associated with it and its impact on professional practice is given in section 5.6 and Terry's spiritual promptings arising from the spectacle of the natural world are analysed in section 5.4.

Unsurprisingly, given the findings of Chaplain (2001) and Early and Weindling (2004) positive relationships of different kinds with their communities were a significant source of satisfaction for the headteachers. Rory, for example, reflected on his life in his school's community before

the sudden death of his first wife, suggesting a strong alignment of his values and beliefs with those of its members:

I had a wonderful life and I mean that in every sense of the word. I had my wife and my family and a great school and great people; these were my friends. We'd work, we'd play, we'd pray together. (interview 1)

Conversely, fractured relationships with the school's community could cause stress and anxiety (Chaplain, 2001; NCSL, 2007), particularly when these related to perceived differences of educational purpose. The heads' narratives suggested that such distressing experiences may be accompanied by profound reflection on matters of value and worth and precipitate an appreciation of their interconnectedness with others.

5.3.1 Meaning-making in community

The death of one of its members raised profound questions for the school's community as a whole. Rory took his attempts to make sense of the death of his wife into his Catholic community, sharing his experience, reflections and his own meaning-making with its members in formal and informal settings. In contrast, Dave's account of the deaths of two pupils made more limited reference to his community's role in dealing with bereavement and sharing the experience of loss, though he did initiate and participate in memorial rituals. Rather, he attempted to manage the community's reactions to avoid distress and provide security, reflecting his own, as he saw it, responsibility for the protective care for his community.

Bernadette talked at length about her encouragement for her staff to establish and maintain a private reflective journal. In this way, she appeared to be attempting to create a community which invited and encouraged her colleagues to look inwards to find meaning in their work, echoing the contemplative religious traditions evident in her biography. For her, meaning-making was not confined to reactions to tragic, traumatic events, but an integral and accepted part of the school's communal life.

Similarly, Bernadette described (interview 1) her procedure for reconciling staff conflict. It involved accepting different stories, told from different perspectives, deep listening and constructing shared meanings:

...if there's conflict, we come together and tell the story from our perspective. The agreement is you hear that story through and you accept it even if you feel – one teacher said, 'I think the TA is lying', and I said, 'For a purpose, for a reason. So we'll listen to it even if you think it's a lie. It's her story and how she wants to tell it. That's the only thing we can move forward from' ...and we have this understanding that you hear the person's story through. That's what we take action on. Then the other person has to listen to the other perspective and then we move forward.

My field notes recorded many informal and unmanaged interactions between the heads and their communities at the beginning and end of the school day, in each school's entrance and reception spaces or by the school's gate that appeared to encourage a sense of professional closeness through a shared understanding of the school's ways of doing things (Hargreaves, 2001). For example, before school began, Peter, smiling, explained the school's procedures for obtaining replacement uniform ties to the relief of a distraught pupil and her mother (Field note, 14th March, 2007).

5.3.2 Caring

Traditionally, caring is seen as a characteristic of primary educators, though different things may be meant by the term (Hargreaves, 1994; Nias, 1997). So, for example, Bernadette offered 'caring', meaning nurture and support for others at times of difficulty, as one discernible continuity running through her personal and professional lives. Each of the heads seemed to care about their pupils, in the sense that they liked being with them (Nias, 1997). They talked about their general enjoyment when they had contact with pupils, for example through regular teaching or class monitoring commitments. However, this was not always so. Margaret, for example, only established a comfortable relationship with her class, as a teaching head, after a prolonged and difficult period of mutual adjustment. At another level, though, the heads appeared to establish more profound emotional relationships with their pupils. For example, Dave spoke of his and his colleagues' 'love' for the pupil who died unexpectedly: 'I think we displayed our love for that little boy in so many ways' (interview 3).

Margaret (private correspondence, 18th June, 2007) had used St Paul's first letter to the Corinthians (13. 4-8) on love as a means of sharing her vision for All Saints'. She and her colleagues explored the implications of St Paul's writing for teaching and learning. What emerged was a deep sense of service and selflessness, encapsulated in their comments: 'We are there for the children'; 'Not let them down'; 'We must never let them down'.

Data gathered from field visits and interviews suggested that the heads' relationships with pupils were generally very positive. For example, during one field visit, I stayed for school lunch at Holy Trinity. My notes record Peter's joking with a younger Key Stage 2 pupil as we stood together waiting to be served:

I saw your face during dance' [lesson had taken place earlier]. They both grinned. Peter asked the pupils around us if we could cut into the queue to give us more time for our meeting. They smiled and agreed. (Field note, 12th July, 2006)

Occasionally, relationships with pupils prompted more intense and confused reactions. Dave's own experiences of the death of his mother and the questions that it had raised in him seemed to underpin his sensitivity to the wellbeing of a pupil whose father had died from cancer and his concern to make her feel 'special' and 'important' (interview 1) about her

participation in the 'Race for Life'. The earlier, unexpected, death of a pupil represented the distressing end of a warm relationship for him. It also appeared to create feelings of regret as Dave reflected on the abrupt way that he felt that he had sometimes dealt with the boy's misbehaviour; that he had somehow failed his pupil.

Bernadette's account of the humiliation of a younger pupil with learning difficulties by a former member of staff appears to suggest a sense of what Hargreaves (1994, p.143) calls 'depressive guilt'. She seemed to feel that she had betrayed the pupil because she did not know what had gone on:

I felt culpable... I felt that because it had happened I should have been able to protect that child, those children, from that kind of behaviour. I felt besmirched by it, I suppose. (interview 1)

Terry described how, in one sense, he had cared too much, for example in giving of his own time to take pupils away on residential visits. In our second interview, he reflected on the personal costs of such selflessness, the blurring of his personal and professional lives and prioritisation of his pupils' education and development (Nias, 1997). He attributed the breakdown of his marriage and his associated feelings of guilt to such conscientiousness. He concluded:

So I think the crucial thing is that that's had an impact on me as a leader, because I'm wary of how my colleagues are coping with things, especially if they've got demands of families. There is another life out there and this is only a job, but it gets quite difficult to maintain that balance and it has had an impact on me personally. (interview 2)

Margaret, as a teaching head, wrestled with multiple responsibilities, an expanding workload and a sense of enforced compromise, balancing, somewhat uneasily, her personal wellbeing and her professional obligations:

Perhaps it [her classroom teaching] wasn't as good in the past as you remember it but you're always wanted to do things well and you can't possibly do everything really well. So I worked very long hours but actually being with the children there's a sort of realism about all this. I'd get to half-past eight at night sometimes and think, 'Right, I've got all these books to mark or I could go to bed. Which one of those is going to benefit the school more?' And I'd just go to bed. Marking can wait, if I haven't had enough sleep everybody else is going to suffer and I might not get through tomorrow. (interview 3)

Peter believed firmly that the curriculum lay at the centre of his school's activities and that all else flowed from that. Improving learning and developing pupils as learners were high on his agenda. Such a position, though, raised inescapable moral questions about the purposes of learning (Nias, 1997). Peter seemed to have sensed these implications. In his narrative (interview 2) he referred to what he called 'the loss of moral purpose' in education. For Peter, his moral responsibility for pupils' learning lay in providing learning experiences in ways that

accorded to his belief system, requiring him to question and debate the nature of the curriculum he was obliged to provide. For him, 'moral purpose' meant:

...you believe that you're doing something which will make a positive influence on every child's life to make them a better person. (interview 2)

Moreover, his moral responsibility included the provision of opportunities and space for pupils to reflect on their experiences, which some would include in what may be called the spiritual dimension of education:

It's not about this is what happens, this is what you do, do this by, be tested and move on and they don't have to think about it. I think that the curriculum is a place where you give children time to reflect and take stock of what they have experienced. (interview 2)

Like those with pupils, the heads' relationships with their teaching, administrative and support staff colleagues seemed to be generally positive and a source of satisfaction to them.

However, dealing with underperforming staff could create difficulties that clouded staff relationships, perhaps forcing heads into periods of professional isolation to preserve the integrity of disciplinary procedures, alleviated only by contact with a close confidante such as a chair of governors.

Terry's preferred approach to his colleagues was one of openness:

But my personal approach is one of openness, so I've gone out of my way to explain, to justify but not accept the status quo necessarily. So when there is a problem, it's been a problem shared and I've given people time. (interview 2)

Terry seemed to suggest that the interpretations that his colleagues put on his actions were important to him. He was attempting to give his staff an understanding of his judgements and provide opportunities to develop shared meanings. In so doing, he appeared to be dealing with his colleagues' needs and aspirations, that is, with what they could become. In this sense, he was appealing to the spirit (Sergiovanni, 2001).

5.3.3 Dealing with isolation

The heads' narratives described episodic periods of isolation from their school's communities, not only in the physical sense, but also in a deeper emotional sense. Often, it did not appear to be an isolation borne of a desire for solitude, such as Dave's seafront walk as he pondered the sudden death of a pupil. Rather it seemed to be dictated by circumstances, perhaps during the course of staff competence procedures and became what Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, (2004, p.29) call a curious kind of public isolation 'in a goldfish bowl'. Of course, the heads accepted that there were necessary boundaries relating to confidential matters

and, sometimes, to decision-making. However, there appeared to be a particular tension for the heads when isolation was forced upon them. After all, their accounts and my observations suggested that they spent most of their time relating to others, seeking to create and maintain an environment characterised by a sense of openness and trust.

Once disciplinary proceedings were under way, the heads were bound by professional confidentiality and thus committed to professional isolation. Margaret reflected:

I think I wasn't quite ready for the loneliness of not being able to talk about stuff like that. (interview 1)

She was sustained by her conviction that she was acting in the best interests of her school's community and by her conversations with her chair of governors who acted as confidante and gave her support. The episode had taken some two years to resolve. Dave recalled the sudden death of a pupil and his solitary walk along a nearby beach on the evening that he had heard the news. His isolation was that of voluntary solitude, rather than professional exigency, to gather his thoughts and reflect on matters of concern to him.

Occasionally events required heads to take the lead, sometimes seemingly at odds with their schools' communities. Such detachment, a positional isolation, however brief, could be grounded in the need to sustain gospel values: Rory's public action as a 'fool for Christ' bewildered his staff. Dave did not appear to have been prepared, either professionally or personally, for the sudden death of a pupil, but saw the event as one in which only he could take the lead. This was, in his view, not a matter for delegation. Dealing with the death of the pupil confirmed his perception that it was such moments, 'when the Exocet lands' (interview 2), that marked out the head from other leaders in the school's community. Dave perceived that the moment required him to act with individual resolve. Taking the lead in such a public manner prompted him and other heads to consider the power that headship carried and the responsibilities that went with it. Dave reflected on his actions:

So it was leadership; it was leading the school community through that difficulty. I don't necessarily think we recognise the huge power and impact we have on occasions such as that. (interview 3a)

Bernadette reflected on what she had learnt from her intervention into inter-parental conflict:

I suppose what I've learned from it is that you have to be very careful about how you use your professional power because it seems to have been OK, but it could have been damaging. I had to step beyond my brief and I was aware of that. (interview 2)

She confessed to being 'surprised by the power of headship' (interview 2) but also acutely aware of its responsibilities. Terry also saw the influence that a head had and his own

sensitivity to the pivotal role that he had in forming the lives of many people as being a 'very powerful motivator' (interview 3) for him, at once humbling and rewarding.

Both Bernadette and Peter talked of isolation in their own lives following personal bereavements. For Bernadette in particular, her isolation was not simply from her community: she felt, devastatingly, that God was not there in her moment of need. Both reflected on how their experiences of personal isolation had influenced their work in schools.

5.3.4 Emotions

The heads seemed to experience happiness and satisfaction in their work when they felt that their work was recognised and they were achieving their educational purposes. Terry and Dave shared letters and cards expressing appreciation for their efforts from parents/carers and past pupils with me at different times during my field visits. For the heads, such feedback appeared to confirm the affinity of purpose and, therefore, moral agreement with their community that Hargreaves (2001, p.1067) calls 'moral closeness'. Terry commented:

When you get letters of thanks from parents, when you get cards like that one I showed you from a past pupil, that helps to fuel the inner strength. (interview 3)

Negative emotions were more evident when the heads' educational purposes appeared to be threatened, or their efforts unappreciated. For example, Terry described an incident of a pupil being 'unpleasant' towards a teaching colleague. According to his account in interview 1, Terry insisted on an apology, directing the pupil towards the teacher concerned. What followed shook him. His actions 'brought a torrent of accusation' from the pupil's parents. The event appeared to damage his confidence and make him question the direction of his school: 'Where are we going?' He concluded: 'It took me quite a long time to get over it – the venom behind it.'

Bernadette described how tensions between dysfunctional families had led to angry, violent confrontations that had impacted on St Mary's wider community. She had intervened, frustrated at what she saw as the ineffectiveness of the appropriate social agencies. Bernadette had interviewed the adults concerned individually in an attempt to resolve the situation, even though she was aware that in so doing, she had crossed what may be seen as bureaucratic boundaries (Lightfoot, 2009):

My common sense told me don't step there because it's out of school, it's beyond my remit, keep away from it. (interview 2)

As she reflected on the episode, her feelings seemed mixed. She felt angry with the parents, even sorry for them, but: 'I could feel no empathy, which is sad really but I couldn't'. She distanced herself morally from their behaviour which she condemned as 'sordid', 'malicious'

and 'unpleasant' (interview 2) and found their lack of capacity to change frustrating and difficult to accept. The dissonance between her and the parents she was dealing with seemed to be a source of intense disturbance to her and an affront to the values she encouraged in her school's community. Interestingly, personal contact of itself (the parents had had many opportunities to meet Bernadette) had not been sufficient to create the moral alignment she wanted (Hargreaves, 2001).

Rory lived in his parish and school community, close to St Jude's. In this way, he lived out the tripartite relationship between home, school and parish that informed traditional Catholic thinking about the role of these agencies in the nurture of young people within a context of faith. He recognised the demands and strains that such physical and professional closeness to the community could bring, but, in spite of these, felt that this was what he wanted to do; consciously blurring his professional and personal lives:

This is my way of running the school; it can be painful, but it works for me. I'm comfortable with that. (interview 3)

5.3.5 Summary

The heads seemed deeply aware not only of their own responsibilities but also of how their work was interconnected with that of other members of the school's community. Such interdependence, because of its ambiguity and unpredictability, could be disconcerting for them. In addition, the episodes that the heads described and my own observations of them in work contexts appeared to suggest their need, on the one hand, to fulfil a sense of calling (perhaps as a response to the divine) and, on the other, the desire to be understood and appreciated by their communities and to make a difference to the lives of their members through service to them that Fry (2003, p.694) calls 'spiritual survival'.

5.4 Personal/Implicit spirituality

This section seeks to examine the nature and extent of the headteachers' personal/implicit spirituality revealed indirectly through the range of data. It explores, in particular, the heads' spiritual promptings discerned through their responses to bereavement, the nonreligious rituals that they initiated and sustained and aspects of their schools' cultural life such as humour.

5.4.1 Bereavement

Five of the headteachers included accounts of bereavement in their narratives. In various and different ways, the experience of bereavement and the questions that it compelled each of

them to confront were perceived by them to have shaped their approach to school leadership significantly.

During the course of our first two interviews, Dave elected to include accounts of the death of his mother and those of two pupils in his narrative. One pupil had died unexpectedly, the other after a lengthy illness. The death of his mother had caused him to reflect on, and reject, the possibility of an after-life. As she was dying, he recalled that had comforted her:

She knew she was dying and I knew she was dying and I just remember saying to her something like, 'Yes, but you are going to a better place'. Did I say that because I believed it or did I say that because I wanted to help my Mum? I think I did it to help my Mum. I don't think I believed in it that much. (interview 3a)

An older Year 6 pupil had died suddenly about a year before the research study began and a memorial bench was being installed in the school's grounds on the afternoon of one of my early field visits (Field note, 18th July, 2006). Dave recalled that he had felt ill-equipped to cope with the loss: dealing with a pupil's death was not something that he had associated with primary school life. On the evening of the pupil's death, Dave had driven alone to a nearby coastal resort, walked and watched cricket: 'I think I went quite quiet, reflective. I just wanted to be on my own' (interview 2). He recalled the thoughts that went through his mind, provoked by the seeming unfairness of the death of such a young child and his feelings for the family concerned: 'Why should it happen to him? Why should it happen to that family?' (interview 2). Dave's answers to such questions seemed to offer little consolation to him. He did not accept or find comfort in any notion of a heaven after death. His distress was for the loss of a young life and the end of the relationship that he had built with the pupil and his family. Dave had been invited to speak at the pupil's funeral, something he regarded as an 'honour' and a 'privilege' (interview 2). He noted an unidentified 'strength' (interview 2) that had come to him and appeared to carry him through the emotional intensity of the occasion.

Dave had sought to contain his own feelings and to generate calm across the school's community. As well as offering general reassurance, his actions had a use value in that they also appeared to have helped him to cope and to have provided him with a deep sense of fulfilment as the school's leader (Hargreaves, 2001). He commented in our final interview:

When I received that phone call, I needed to be the person that told people what had happened; I needed to make sure that the school stayed calm, we didn't need hysteria. We needed to be calm and peaceful. How we dealt with that...I look back on that with a great deal of pride because we dealt with that with great humility, with great sensitivity and I think we displayed our love for that little boy in so many ways. (interview 3)

Dave also described a second, expected, death of a pupil. Unlike the first bereavement, he was not satisfied with the way that his staff had dealt with the loss in school. News of the death had found its way to the school's community in a way that he had not intended and

could not control, and so negated his plan that pupils' families should inform them of the loss in the first instance, to be followed by a reflective memorial assembly in school the following day.

Peter introduced both the death of his parents and of a pupil in school (where he was then its deputy headteacher) into his narrative (interview 1). He described the growing doubts that he had experienced relating to his own Christian faith, linked to the loss of his parents and his gradual return to belief. He associated the change with the influence of his headteacher at that time, in particular the way that he had dealt with the family of a pupil who had died suddenly. Peter's headteacher seemed to have offered him an example of compassion towards a bereaved parent; of patient listening. This appeared to have encouraged Peter to reflect on his Christian belief and to have gone some way towards restoring his personal faith commitment. In spite of this, Peter suggested that a personal faith may not always provide a useful reservoir for heads to draw upon in dealing with the bereavement of others. In his view, it could lead to unhelpful assumptions about how others may view death and loss. Peter's own experience of bereavement seemed to have enabled him to understand that members of his school's community may not wish to talk about their loss and may wish to remain isolated: that had been his reaction to his bereavement and he recognised that others could act in the same way. For him, Holy Trinity had to provide security and respite for its community at such times.

During the interview sequence, Rory returned frequently to his Catholic belief in death and resurrection and it appeared to have provided him with hope in times of great distress. The exact nature of that belief, for example the extent to which Rory understood resurrection in any literal sense lay beyond the scope of the research study and was not examined. During our first interview, Rory described the unexpected death of his wife after a short illness. In his words, the experience had been 'life-changing'. We returned to the event on a number of occasions. It appeared to have affected his headship in a variety of ways and to have enabled him to support members of his community who had suffered loss with compassion. On two occasions, he recalled an encounter with a father who had lost his wife. His feelings seemed to have taken him beyond what some may regard as appropriate professional boundaries and into tears. He confessed: 'She died and he was in tears and I found myself in tears' (interview 1) and later: 'I think again, because of the shared experience, the empathy is very powerful' (interview 2).

Rory had had numerous experiences of bereavement in school. He had witnessed the journey of a priest that he knew towards his own death and had reflected deeply on the event. Rory had shared his responses to the death of his wife with members of his parish community as a part of the activities of a diocesan support network for people who had been in similar,

distressing situations, wanting to assure his parish community members that grief passes and so to provide comfort and solace for them:

I guess in talking to people, I want to share with them my story and allow them to see that there is...that you do go through thissomething on the other side. (interview 2)

His community also appeared to be helping him to make meaning of his own loss: in this sense, meaning-making brought mutual consolation.

Rory referred frequently to time, reflecting on the brief, transient nature of human life. He felt that death should be acknowledged as a part of the human condition in the ongoing work of his school:

It's still an area of taboo for many of us and I feel very strongly that children – not that you've constantly got to be reminding them of it – it should be an acknowledgement in the grand scale of things; about what life is and where it's going to end. (interview 3)

In this sense, for Rory, death appeared to provide an affirmation of his faith.

Terry's father had died when Terry was his teens and from his account during our interviews, he had still not really come to terms with that loss and its impact on him at such a crucial time in his life. In Terry's view, personal bereavement had nurtured in him a particular empathy with those children who had difficulties of different kinds in their home lives. For this reason, Terry suggested that separating the personal from the professional in his schoolwork was impossible, commenting that life's extremes needed to be experienced before they could be fully understood.

During our first interview, covering general biographical details, Bernadette introduced an account of the sudden death of her teenage son. Our discussion revolved around her reactions, her changing faith position and her perceptions of the lasting impact that such a devastating loss had had on her headship practice. She had been 'devastated' and felt abandoned by God. Like Terry, Bernadette's bereavement appeared to have given her new perspectives on the lives of her school's troubled families and to have nurtured a particular concern for them. Like Peter, she understood that people may wish to suffer alone: she recognised the perception that they may have that no one was aware of their hurt and the isolation of their pain. These insights shaped her response to parents, particularly younger mothers in her school's community and the isolation experienced by them when familial relationships were fractured. Bernadette saw a clear role for St Mary's as a supportive community, underpinned by what some may call the spiritual virtue of compassion. Her son's death was perceived as a very significant event in her life and appeared to have become a reference point for subsequent events, both personal and professional.

5.4.2 The spiritual dimension discerned indirectly

This section describes and interprets those aspects of the spiritual dimension in the headteachers' lives that may be revealed implicitly in their narratives, in observations of them in school or in the documentation that they provided. In particular, it examines humour and nonreligious rituals, though clues to the spiritual could be found in other places. For example, Dave and Bernadette endorsed the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2003) enshrined in the 2004 Children Act and intended to protect and improve children's wellbeing. For Dave and Bernadette, it seemed to offer affirmation of their pedagogical concern for the child as a whole person. Much depends upon how spirituality is understood, but it could be argued that such holism, at least implicitly, includes a spiritual dimension (Watson, 2006).

My field notes of observations of the heads at work included numerous examples of their positive encounters, often through shared jokes and laughter, with their schools' communities. For example, during Peter's tour of Holy Trinity before the morning session began, he encountered two older pupils waiting by the school's door. The parent/carer who accompanied them explained that they didn't know if they were allowed in school as the morning bell had not yet been rung. Peter smiled and responded: 'Ding, ding. Now you can come in'. The pupils and adult smiled in return (Field note, 14th March, 2007), seemingly buoyed by the exchange.

The heads themselves were sometimes the butt of their community's humour. Terry was teased about his liking for chocolates by his administrative staff and Peter about the colour of the tie he wore at an inter-school netball match by Holy Trinity's parents: 'Which side are you going to cheer?' (Field note, Holy Trinity, 27th November, 2006). The humorous exchanges observed in the schools seemed to help to create a sense of belonging and openness (Nias et al., 1989). For example, All Saints' staffroom displayed photographs of staff in different costumes and a photograph of Dave, involved in a fund-raising event, featured prominently in the entrance area of Shore Close. The potentially malicious or excluding functions of humour were not encountered (Terry, 1993; Johnson, 2005).

Each school community had its own rituals and ceremonies, often reaffirming its members' importance to that community or celebrating their achievements (Nias et al., 1989). For example, at St Mary's I joined one of a regular series of tea parties for the youngest pupils (17th January, 2007) designed to recognise progress in reading; a tradition that Bernadette had developed over the months before the research study began. The party offered rich potential for pupils to talk about issues related to the cultural values of the school raised by the favourite books that they had brought along, such as whether winning a race is more important than losing friendship or to reflect on the illustrations that their books included, for example, of the night sky. Bernadette, as well as initiating and promoting conversation,

arranged place settings, poured drinks and served cake, revealing her sense of service to, and concern for, others. In this sense, the tea party, as well as celebrating reading, seemed to provide an opportunity for her to live out her own moral and spiritual values.

5.4.3 Summary

In different ways, headteachers suggested that their experiences of bereavement led them to a deeper empathy with those members of their school's community in distress or difficulty. For example, Bernadette commented that her own feeling for and understanding of parents' difficulties could not have developed without her first-hand experience of loss. In turn, the upsurge of emotion associated with loss appears to challenge the emotional and professional boundaries, sometimes characterised as 'keeping a professional distance', normally associated with headship. In schools, humour appeared to function in predominantly relational ways: it indicated and drew upon shared meanings and seemed to help to create, build and maintain open relationships.

5.5 Explicit perceptions of spirituality

The heads made no distinction in their narratives between their perceptions of the concept of spirituality *per se*, the promptings that called forth spiritual responses from them and any discernable spiritual dimension in their headships. Understandably, they drew on both personal and professional events and experiences in their discussions of the concept and the language they used to describe it. Tellingly, Rory pointed out that, in his view, it was difficult to disentangle the two:

I think it's difficult to separate the two; it's more about the spiritual dimension of the person which reflects on headship and the spirituality within the individual, I think, makes you the kind of head that you are. So I think it would be quite hard to tease out the spiritual dimension of headship as such; you've got to go back to the individual and see how their spirituality impinges on their headship role. (interview 3)

For this reason, in this section, the heads' explicit perceptions of spirituality and their reflections on their personal spirituality or any spiritual dimension in their headship are considered together. In this way, a composite picture of their interpretations of the concept of spirituality and its promptings in their work is constructed, reflecting the way that they chose to respond to the use of the term.

Not surprisingly, given the ambiguities surrounding the term and its use in educational settings the heads' explicit perceptions of spirituality provided through their narratives seemed hesitant and provisional (Eaude, 2002). However, the heads' unease did not indicate a lack of engagement with or dismissal of the concept. For example, during our final interview, Bernadette reflected on her difficulties in defining spirituality with sufficient precision to devise

a written policy for promoting pupils' spiritual development in St Mary's and had arranged diocesan-led INSET for this purpose. For her, the spiritual was sensed, felt or discerned and did not lend itself easily to analysis or codification (Priestley, 2005). Similarly, Margaret elected to define spirituality, at least in part, through its absence. She cited her somewhat formulaic approach to leading collective worship in her early, vulnerable days as head of All Saints' as an illustration of a lack of that quality of connectedness between her and her community that Sergiovanni (2005, p.118) calls 'relational trust'; a circumstance inimical to creating the relational depth that, for her, appeared to be an important indicator of spirituality:

I think it's where people are most at ease that you see it coming out really, so it's in the quality of relationships, isn't it? (interview 3)

5.5.1 The essence of the person

Overall, though in slightly different ways, the heads seemed to perceive spirituality as what may be termed the essence of each person; that which is unique, distinguishing one person from another (Newby, 1994). This uniqueness was not confined to appearance or ways of doing things; it included beliefs, values and principles for living. Dave suggested:

I think that's what spirituality means to me; the bit that makes you, you and all you stand for and all that you believe in. (interview 3)

He described spirituality as the particular and distinguishing life flame of each person that disappears at the moment of death, leaving behind a material body:

There's something in you I don't know what it is but when – I've only seen one dead body when my mum died – when she was dead, there was something that was gone from her. I don't know what it was, but it was a body. It was something like the source of life had been extinguished; a flame had gone. (interview 3)

Dave's perception, in a general sense, is of spirituality as that which gives life or animates; a reminder of the origin of the term (Carrette and King, 2005). He also contended that deeply held principles (and their animation) were an important aspect of what may be meant by spirituality in the context of school leadership. So, for him, though he struggled to define the concept, that which gives life was evident in the manner in which: 'you deal with certain things; how you react to things' (interview 3).

Margaret also appeared to perceive spirituality as a dimension of identity (Newby, 1994) but in a different way. She seemed to see spirituality growing from the realisation of particular, God-given gifts. As such it was that part of a person that was surprising, unpredictable and so could not be planned for in school in any rigid sense. It could grow, perhaps as a result of life's experiences. So, as a committed Christian headteacher, Margaret saw her role as that of drawing out and encouraging the development of this uniqueness:

I think, especially as Christian headteacher, with a community of people who've all got that spiritual potential within them, it's a bit like the Vygotsky's rousing minds to life bit, isn't it? Giving people permission to develop that bit perhaps? (interview 3)

5.5.2 Spirituality and religious belief and practice

Margaret, Terry and Rory, heads with a background in religious faith, seemed to accept that it was possible, at least conceptually, to separate spirituality from religious belief and practice.

Margaret commented:

I think people who haven't got a faith particularly have also got that spiritual bit to them, haven't they? (interview 3)

Terry mused on his sources of sustenance and motivation, like Margaret, distinguishing faith from spirituality:

No, I don't think it's fair to say that a religious belief, a religious belief, has driven me in my career, because that would be an over-statement. But I think it's fair to say that there is an underlying spiritual aspect to my philosophy which has driven me, if I can put it that way. Does that make sense? (interview 3)

However, their separation of spirituality from religious belief was not complete. They could not, and did not seem to want to, avoid their Judeo-Christian cultural heritage, so Terry, whilst determined to differentiate between the two, was happy to reveal that he drew his perceptions of spirituality from those 'aspects of life that are common to all religious beliefs' (interview 3).

Rory, a committed Catholic, whilst acknowledging a distinction between religion and spirituality, confirmed that he was:

...happy to be in the Catholic tradition – I see in it and find in it – spirituality. (interview 3)

Interestingly, Rory appeared to be inverting Hay's (Hay with Nye, 2006) argument that religion springs from spirituality. For him, his spirituality was rooted in, and sprang from, his Catholic belief and practice.

Peter's comments, on the other hand, reflected his perception that spirituality had little meaning if it was separated from religious conviction (Thatcher, 1999). In his view, actions that were not motivated by religious faith and were inspired in a different way (perhaps by a secular humanitarian ethic) could not be called spiritual. Using love for others as an example, Peter distinguished moral from spiritual action. He accepted that a humanitarian ethic could inspire such love. For him, though, for the love of others to be described as a spiritual, rather than a moral virtue, it had to be infused with an understanding that loving relationships are informed by a love of God. So, the way that human life, including headship, was conducted,

should be a witness to that love. For Peter, the source of its motivation, not the outcome, was what separated the spiritual from other sorts of action.

Peter also elected to distinguish the spiritual from what he described as the rational or intellectual mind (he used the terms interchangeably) and argued that the spiritual had to be balanced by the rational in his work in school. His comments seemed to suggest that he saw two forces, held in a necessary tension, informing his leadership decisions and the actions that followed: a rational, dispassionate weighing of evidence, including legal requirements and professional expectations on the one hand and his personal values and beliefs, including those formed by religious faith on the other. That is not to say that his 'intellect' was entirely separate from the spiritual in practice; rather they were interdependent (West-Burnham, 1997). In spite of his conceptual separation, Peter drew attention to the interconnectedness of spirit and intellect, using the dilemmas created when faith-based values appeared to conflict with institutional requirements to structure his presentation on spirituality and faith school leadership to his diocesan colleagues. In this sense, he appeared to be hinting at a conception of a religiously-based spirituality as a potential source of disturbance and challenge to headteachers in the running of faith schools.

5.5.3 Awe and mystery

A number of the heads included what may be called a reflective dimension in their perceptions of spirituality. For example, Rory confided, using the religious imagery of a journey:

...for me - reflecting on the inner journey: my life, my relationships and respect for the natural world. (interview 3)

For him, such reflection included the experience of prayer as well as affective promptings that he defined as 'awe and reverence' (interview 3).

Bernadette included in her perceptions of spirituality:

I mean spirituality, for me it's the capacity, I suppose, to experience and feel (pause) things like wonder and things like inspiration and the ability to take your thinking beyond your day-to-day experiences. (interview 3)

Later in the same interview, she observed that as a head, she drew upon something more than practical skills and professional understandings to sustain her work:

There's that something else that comes that's hard to define really but I think it is around. It's like a higher meaning of something; something that goes beyond the practical. I don't know that I can define it any more fully than that. (interview 3)

For her, spirituality seemed to involve thinking beyond and withdrawal from the mundane. Overall, for the heads though, such opportunities for deep reflection seemed limited. Terry for example, revealed that, even during moments of silence away from school, his attempts to 'empty his head of school' (interview 3) were largely unsuccessful.

Given Bernadette's hesitancy in talking about spirituality, I sought further clues to her perceptions of the term by asking if she could provide examples of she would be happy to call spiritual moments in her life. They included her reactions to birth, natural phenomena, artistic representations of feelings and sharing the work of young pupils with them:

Well there are the very personal ones...the birth of your children ...the real absolute wonders. When suddenly there's this independent small creature that's there is absolutely wonderful and the perfection of humans really in their innocence. Then waking up one morning, stepping out onto a balcony and watching the sun rise is absolutely wonderful. When that happens you think what a wonderful world we live in, isn't it beautiful? I also get those feelings in the celebratory feeling when you go into an absolutely incredible exhibition of art work and you think this wonderful creativity. That for me is spiritual and of course the moments when children bring things to you, because I work with children. Those very, very special wonderful moments when you can share something or a child shares something with you that is quite personal and insightful. You recognise the spirituality in a small child. (interview 3)

During our preliminary informal conversation before the third interview began, Bernadette had prefaced these thoughts. She remarked:

There is nothing better to remind you of God's work in the world than a young child when it first discovers something.

In this sense, Bernadette seemed to discern the presence of the divine in the work and lives of young children at St Mary's. Her description of her own spiritual promptings and the sense of wonder provoked in her by young children's learning suggested that she regarded her young pupils in two ways: as capable of inspiring awe and reverence in her and (as her use of religious language suggests) as carrying the spark of the divine within them.

Terry placed greater explicit emphasis on spirituality as a sense of mystery in the face of natural phenomena than the other heads. He saw his own spirituality clearly: 'in terms of the awe and wonder of the earth that we live on' (interview 2).

5.5.4 Spirituality as guidance for living

Spirituality as the heads perceived it appeared to provide guidance for living, particularly about their relationships with others in the school's community. So Rory talked of a spirituality that included: 'evaluating my actions against a value system of my choosing' (interview 3).

Peter set his thoughts on the concept and its implied imperatives, not unexpectedly, in the context of his perception that spirituality had little meaning outside a religious context:

I think spirituality is (lengthy pause) if you are...the way that you are as a person and the way that you actually work and the way that you live your life is based upon, no, not based upon because I think that's not true; I think can be seen and linked to an understanding of a greater love. So if you believe that there is actually a God and that God loves the world then spirituality is about that love and you doing something about transmitting that love through yourself. (interview 3)

In spite of their difficulties in grappling with the concept, almost all the heads suggested that spirituality (in summary, the essence of the person which included principles, beliefs and worldviews) provided both sustenance and inspiration in their work. Dave talked about dealing with difficulties in school:

There's something, an inner strength upon which you draw. Now I don't know what that is. You can't put your finger on it; you can't train it...

Something inside you that grows as you grow; some people keep it more hidden than others. It's just about being a person, being a human being that sustains you through the difficult times and enables you to grow and come out of the other side a better person able to cope with whatever life has to throw at you. That's what it is. (interview 3)

During our final interview, Bernadette connected what she called the spiritual dimension in her life to the vision that she had for St Mary's; with what the school could become:

I think the spiritual dimension is the inspiration that comes to us as headteachers. It's what sustains us through our headship and I suppose it sort of falls on our personal vision because that is far broader than any experience we require or any action we take. (interview 3)

From her narrative, Bernadette's vision seemed to represent deeply held personal truths involving that which was of ultimate, and so spiritual, concern to her (Emmons, 2000).

To shed further light on their perceptions and understandings of the term, each head was invited to describe how spirituality could be discerned or sensed in his/her school. The heads' responses were almost entirely rooted in personal relationships. Peter suggested: 'In terms of the way you work with children, the way you work with people' (interview 3) and related this in turn to the fruits of the Spirit: 'the greatest of those being love' (interview 3). Dave reiterated a similar perception:

You'd find it in the way in which our expectations are of our children; the way in which we react with each other... You try to treat youngsters as individuals again; that relationship that you build with them, I'd like to think that you'd show it to the staff ...' (interview 3)

Terry included capacities for care and respect for others and for the environment in his description of how spirituality could be recognised. He offered a picture of what teachers and pupils may contribute to the spiritual life of the school, extending this relationality beyond Rising Mead's immediate community to include other communities and the environment. Rory added the dimension of reflection. For him, in the Catholic context, spirituality could be recognised in opportunities for prayer and reflection provided in school.

5.5.5 Spirituality and change

The heads grounded the language in which they chose to describe spirituality mainly in their own experiences in their school communities. It may have been the case that the term had assumed different, more nuanced hues and emphases for them according to these individual contexts. So, in interview 3, I asked if the school's community had supported or hindered the development of what they considered to be their own spirituality.

Rory commented that the influence had been: 'sometimes positive and sometimes negative - it waxes and wanes' (interview 3). He had shared his bereavement and its effects on him with his parish community; in turn other parishioners had shared their experiences with him, which he found to be a: 'humbling experience' (interview 3). He recounted, too, how dealing with a disruptive member of staff had made him confront his own capacity for forgiveness:

...but that tension is part of our journey. It's easy to love your friends; loving your enemy is the tough bit. (interview 3)

Terry, who perceived the working out of his spirituality in terms of broadly Christian principles for living, recalled colleagues who had reaffirmed his own 'educational philosophy' (interview 3) through the strength of their convictions.

Taking up the headship of St Mary's had given Bernadette the opportunity to think beyond the mundane; the chance to wrestle with questions of what she was ultimately committed to in developing her school and its community:

... I don't know whether this is spiritual but it has given me an intense satisfaction but not complacency that in my long career I've been able to achieve something that's making a difference to people's lives and that is not a complacent satisfaction and it's not a smug satisfaction, it's just a feeling that yes, together here as a school community we're making a difference. (interview 3).

5.5.6 Summary

Of the heads in the study, only Dave had not held a religious commitment at some point in his biography. However, his perception that spirituality was to do with what may be called the essence of the person found echoes amongst other heads with religious backgrounds.

Individual differences in perceptions were most marked between those heads who were happy to accept some separation of spirituality from religious belief and practice and Peter who was not.

The heads' indications of how spirituality may be most easily discerned in their schools emphasised relational concerns with communal values, social justice, and ethical ideals of love and compassion towards others. Potential dissent remained implicit in their work (Hay, 2001; Fraser, 2007). The notion that spirituality could be unsettling or revolutionary seemed largely absent from the heads' perceptions of the term, though their accounts of their experiences provided some evidence of implicit disturbance as they sought to cling to their spiritual values in difficult times. Interestingly, the spiritual potential in their loss of self as they worked through painful times was not always recognised explicitly in the heads' perceptions of the concept. Yet such moments were rich in spiritual activity, for example Rory's compassionate encounter with a recently widowed parent (McGhee, 2003; Tubbs, 2005).

5.6 Religious belief and headship

The heads' religious-based promptings and their effects on their school practices are considered in the sections addressing: their perceptions of spirituality; the spirituality implicit in their narratives and work; their relationships and their values. This section examines the particular place of the heads' religious beliefs in their work from data relating to their responses to bereavement, their prayer lives and the religiously-based school rituals that they initiated and led. Dave's work as a head, in spite of his nonreligious position, was rich with religious connotations and is included for this reason.

5.6.1 Religious belief and heads' reactions to bereavement

Though all the headteachers except Dave subscribed to a Christian faith tradition, the specific nature of their beliefs, degrees of commitment and individual religious practices appeared to vary widely. The role of religious belief in enabling the heads to adjust to bereavement was complex and problematic and a simple causal relationship between religious belief and less painful adjustment to bereavement cannot be assumed (Stroebe, 2004). Indeed, for Bernadette, her Catholic belief offered no consolation at the time of her son's death. The heads' accounts offered insights into their systems of meaning-making in the course of coming to terms with bereavement and, in so doing, revealed how their responses and reactions relate to their religious beliefs. Rory, for example, returned frequently to the Catholic belief in death and resurrection that appeared to provide hope for the future for him in times of distress. The nature of that belief was not examined in any depth in the course of our interviews. However, its meaning for him seemed to include the promise of renewal after death. In contrast, Dave appeared to hold the view that death marked the end of human

existence and did not accept any notion of a heaven after death. Dave's distress seemed to be for the bewildering loss of a young life; the end of the relationship that he had built with the pupil and his family and for the loss of his own mother, who had had, according to his narrative, a significant presence at key moments of his life.

At the time of the project Rory had re-married. His second wife, like him, was a committed, practising Catholic. During our final interview, he talked about the nature of relationships, their centrality to his conception of spirituality and his dealing with bereavement in school. His narrative appeared to affirm his belief in an afterlife and suggest a capacity for reminiscence that gave him comfort:

I might have mentioned to you last time, something that [second wife] said to me a few weeks back which I found very moving. She gave me a hug in the kitchen and said to me, 'I talk to [first wife] sometimes and I tell her that I'm looking after you.' I thought, 'Oh, wow'. It cut me there; incredibly emotional and that again... relationships are everything, particularly in spirituality. (interview 3)

Dave's responses to both the loss of a pupil and the loss of his mother appeared to include similar elements of such a reminiscence of the deceased (the ritual of throwing stones and the installation of a memorial bench; his daughter's wearing of his mother's name on her running vest) outside a framework of religious belief (Stroebe, 2004).

During our first and second interviews, Bernadette reflected on the sudden, traumatic death of her son. Her traditional Catholic roots and upbringing had created an expectation that God would provide comfort and support at such times of distress. However, she seemed to feel that the anger and grief that she felt were somehow negative, disrespectful or inappropriate (Duffy, 2004). Although Bernadette's religious background was very similar to Rory's (like him, she had not chosen to be a Catholic; both were brought up in observant families and Catholicism seemed to be a part of each of their identities), she did not appear to find the reassurance in Christian ideas of hope and resurrection that he did and found it impossible to handle her potentially devastating feelings. The spiritual experience of isolation from God that she described had, for her, an educative effect. Her isolation was deeply felt but provoked in her a deeper sense of what she was doing in her community initiatives. Bernadette's self-awareness and the meaning that she gave to her professional life had changed as a result of her experience. In contrast, for Rory, as well as enabling him to cope, his religious tradition seemed to provide a model for dealing with difficult situations and with suffering.

5.6.2 Prayer

In different ways, with the exception of Dave, the heads introduced accounts of personal prayer (sometimes in public settings) into their narratives. In the context of the research study, prayer was understood to mean time, however brief, that the heads reported setting aside to

seek guidance or support or to simply reflect in the light of their particular belief in the divine (Fraser, 2007). Such prayer could be private, informal and spontaneous, perhaps stimulated by distressing events, as well as more formal and public, for example in the communal context of the rituals of a church service or act of collective worship in school. Some of the headteachers' accounts, particularly those of Margaret, a deeply committed, active Christian, included frequent references to a personal prayer life and the generally positive effect of such spiritual activity on their work. Others made more limited mention of prayer. Dave, who did not subscribe to a religious tradition or hold a religious belief, made no direct reference to personal prayer in his narrative. However, his narrative provided examples of his reflecting on profound existential questions, but outside a framework of belief in the divine. The research study did not attempt to probe issues of headteachers' understandings of what they were doing as they prayed or any possible associations with their beliefs, for example in divine power, wisdom or justice. Heads' references to prayer are included to illuminate their leadership narratives.

Peter's references to prayer reflected his faith biography, specifically his doubts about his Christian faith and his attempts to distinguish religious or spiritually motivated action from that informed by a social or humanitarian ethic. Prayer, for him, was time for conversation with the 'spiritual self or inner self':

You can actually have somebody with probably no faith who can still have that conversation; it's whether you feel that there is any divine guidance in decision-making or not that separates it between prayer and reflection, I think. (interview 3)

Peter did not see prayer as a means of providing 'answers' (interview 3) to his dilemmas. Rather prayer was an iterative process, an inner conversation or debate, a means of weighing alternatives in the light of his beliefs. For him, professional reflection became prayer when it was purposefully conducted within a context of belief in and consciousness of the presence of the divine. Similarly, prayer for guidance seemed to serve to determine the parameters of a decision to be made and the factors and issues that needed to be considered in making it, including the extent to which his proposed actions were consistent with his beliefs. It was a means of ensuring that his core beliefs informed his decisions.

Bernadette's prayer life was rooted in her Irish Catholic background and she described herself as 'a prayerful person' (interview 3). The sense of the divine seemed to have been present, though shifting in its emphasis, throughout her life. During our conversations, Bernadette described how she had turned to prayer in her professional life, particularly in challenging circumstances, for guidance and support; the emotional intensity inherent in such demands called forth such spiritual activity:

...without consciously preparing to pray my natural reaction to being confused, to being challenged and to being afraid is to pray. I'm not sure how effective my prayer is but it's almost a knee jerk reaction, an unconscious response is prayer. (interview 3)

She described, during our second interview, how parental antagonisms had created unpleasant conflict at the school gates. Bernadette had decided to deal with the issue head on, very aware that she could be crossing role boundaries and so be open to challenge. Prayer appeared to provide a means of considering the parameters of her actions and so seemed to stiffen her sense of purpose and moral resolve. She commented that the thoughts that she regarded as functional and procedural might not always be regarded as prayer by some, but that for her they were. Bernadette saw communal prayer (she provided an example from the school's programme for collective worship) as a means of providing encouragement and hope for all members of the school's community.

For Margaret, prayer informed and infused a number of the key issues in her professional life. She turned to prayer and other spiritual activities regularly, commonly reflecting on biblical passages for inspiration, sustenance and guidance, particularly at critical times. Margaret's prayer life was rooted in devotion to the scriptures and contextualised in her local Christian community. During the data-gathering phase of the research study, our interviews had been rescheduled on a number of occasions to accommodate OfSTED's and diocesan inspectors' timetables for their inspections of All Saints'. We had, however, kept in touch and I was aware of the stresses that Margaret had endured. She recognised the difficulties confronting primary school inspectors and the demands of their task. The petitionary prayer of her school's community that she described, 'that the inspectors would see the right things' (interview 2), reflected this. Such prayer also seemed to affirm the work of the school and so Margaret's own leadership, consolidate an alignment of purpose with her community's members.

We discussed Margaret's reasons for becoming a headteacher on a number of occasions. She had described her belief that her decision had been informed by a sense of calling; a call from God. She felt a deep sense of mission and her headship was imbued with spiritual overtones. Margaret explained how the first class that she taught as a teaching head had been very difficult. Behaviour was poor and she had been forced to question her own teaching abilities: 'I used to write Wednesday on the board and think, 'Right, I've survived another week'' (interview 2).

Faced with this challenge, Margaret's religious tradition, as well as providing a context for nurturing a relationship with God through spiritual activity, seemed to offer to her, like Rory, a model for dealing with personal suffering. Her faith, sustained by her relationship with God that was prompted by meditation on scripture, appeared to provide solace and support:

I was very sure that I was supposed to be here, because all sorts of things fitted into place and when it's all big and scary in particular, that's when I get up early and read my Bible. I do try to read my Bible every morning when I get up, but, when it's really difficult you just know that you need extra help, so you need to be extra prepared for the day. (interview 2)

Margaret's spiritual reading had encouraged her to seek to improve and change her colleagues' practice with the aid of petitionary prayer. She referred to the writings of a Christian missionary:

She had a thing – she used to talk about learning to move people by prayer alone and I just think that's a very powerful one; I don't always remember to do it. (interview 2)

Margaret's faith enabled her to deal with difficulties through prayer. When colleagues saw things differently from her in school, it was an occasion for prayer. She believed that prayer had the capacity to change people and their outlook. Her comments suggested that, when dealing with difficult staffing issues, she attempted to recognise and connect with that of the divine that she held to be within everyone. For Margaret, her staff colleagues had not entered her life randomly; they were there as a part of God's purpose for her. She went on to talk about prayer and its influence in making staffing appointments. Prayer appeared to provide the strength to support her judgements and to step into what was, inevitably, the unknown.

Rory's prayer life took many forms, including reflection in the formal setting of the Mass and a spiritual response to the world around him. Praying, he maintained:

...comes very naturally to me; just the sort of acceptance and acknowledgement of what is around you, beyond you, more than you, greater than you. (interview 3)

During my discussions with him, the issue of communal prayer arose in the context of an act of collective worship for Key Stage 2 children that I had joined as an observer earlier that morning (9th November, 2006). Its theme had been Remembrance Sunday. Rory's prayers during that assembly had focussed on moral issues; war and destruction resulting from the absence of justice, reminiscent of his concern for social justice as a young teacher. The sudden loss of his wife, according to his narrative, had been in the forefront of his mind.

I asked about the difficulties of personal prayer in the public context of assembly, with all the distractions of headship. He responded:

No, I can lose myself in assembly; I can lose myself emotionally. That's why I have to be careful. I can suddenly realise I'm in a place I shouldn't be in front of the children and I become emotional. I think that's part of my life experience, being more mature, and sometimes I think, 'Am I being too intense with the children ?' and I have to watch that because of course I feel very intensely about these important things. But you've got to keep it at the children's level, not cause them some difficulties. I am honest about it; I do enjoy doing assemblies because you're asking about moments that for me are

prayerful moments. It's not just doing an assembly. For me, I'm praying and I'm sharing my prayers and inviting the children to pray with me. So when I ask them to be silent, I can actually just lose myself for a few moments and truthfully pray. (interview 3)

Rory was aware of the public nature of his prayer and the intense emotions surrounding the memories of his bereavement. However, he had realised that his professional position and its expectations required him to hold those emotions in check.

Terry's comments on his personal prayer life and its impact on his work appeared to reflect the influences evident in his narrative: his Christian background; his deep interest in the environment and belief in the interconnectedness of sentient life together with the loss of his father in his early teenage years. These came together in our third interview. We returned to the death of Terry's father; this, in turn, led to a discussion of the place of spiritual activity in dealing with that bereavement. I probed a little further, introducing the idea of prayer, which seemed to flow easily from what had gone before.

Terry confirmed my suggestion that prayer could be characterised as an inner conversation; 'quiet personal discussions in my mind'. He associated these discussions with his own spirituality, his own 'quiet questions'; an opportunity to ask about the meaning, purpose and direction of his life and his work in school. He suggested that such spiritual activity, albeit unconsciously, had an influence on his responses to matters of behaviour and pastoral care in school.

5.6.3 Rites of passage and religious belief

Rory and Margaret described formal school rituals or rites of passage that marked the transition from primary to secondary school for their older Years 6 pupils, each providing opportunities to develop the capacity for coping with transition and change in their lives, which some may see as a spiritual quality. In each case, the ritual seemed to reflect their personal religious beliefs, endorse their headship as Christian ministry and articulate the school community's relationship with the transcendent.

Margaret invited me to attend a final service for All Saints' School leavers held in the church next to the school. It reflected the pattern and symbolism of such rituals described by Davies (1994). The leavers' transitional status was marked: by their separation as they entered the church; their sitting apart from the community throughout the service and the gift of a Bible as each pupil left and the service ended. The gift seemed to affirm the leavers' Christian identity as they moved from one status to another. The service also created reciprocity, confirmed in the readings of those younger pupils who were left behind: 'Don't forget us'... 'Come back and see us' (Field note, 26th July, 2006).

I did not attend the annual leavers' assembly at St Jude's, but Rory described it in interview 2. He described how he shook the hand of each Year 6 leaver, asking them to remember the key scripturally-based values of the school before they left one by one 'ceremoniously' (interview 2): 'to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God'. Like Margaret, he had established a rite of passage that marked an important transition through affirming a sense of identity at a difficult time of change.

Dave described a rite of passage that did not have overt religious connections:

Dave: *We've got a thing on the last day of term. We go down to the beach with the youngsters who are leaving; it's a tradition. They dive in the sea in their school uniform. And we go down there with them – I have to say we were dressed suitably. And we went down there with them and what these holiday makers must have thought, all these children and adults in the sea and there's great enjoyment. It crystallises a lot of what we stand for.*

Stephen: *It's a transition moment.*

Dave: *A transition moment, but we are together at that moment. They will never forget that.* (interview 3).

The ritual created a comic inversion of the normal order of things, sheer fun marking a significant moment of transition in pupils' lives, and is rich in spiritual significance. The pupils' immersion in the sea before emerging to a new social status is redolent with Christian religious symbolism relating to new life and re-birth through baptism. Dave, however, seemed to see the experience predominantly as one which confirmed the relational values of Shore Close School and affirmed its unity rather than the ritual's spiritual qualities.

5.6.4 Summary

Any discussion of heads' religious beliefs and their impact on their professional practice cannot be separated from the particular social, cultural or political context in which they work. The heads who were believers appeared to find a pragmatic, legitimate balance between meeting national requirements and accountability demands and their commitment to their spiritual and moral values in their professional lives. For them, learning outcomes were important, but the processes by which they were achieved had to embody their gospel values.

Prayer was often mentioned in connection with decision-making. Prayers seeking guidance, petitionary prayer, seemed to act as a reminder of the significant, challenging issues that needed to be dealt with by the head; a means of reflecting on potential action in the light of personal beliefs. Such prayer, rather than prayer of praise or thanksgiving appeared to dominate headteachers' prayer lives. Prominent amongst the causes of distress for the heads were anxieties about the effect that their decision could have on others, for example in

matters of staff redundancy, capability procedures or child protection issues. The data suggests that such difficult decisions often prompted prayer or deep reflection on personal spiritual values. For committed believers such as Margaret, prayer was a source of peace, helping her to let go of difficulties, trusting their resolution to God. She believed that her headship was a divine calling and so that God would not ask her to do something without providing support for that task. The communal petitionary prayer that Margaret described appeared to reinforce her own sense of purpose and so provided a source of positive, encouraging, emotional support.

Chapter 6

Interpretation of the research findings

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the research findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 are interpreted and their meanings explored. It is argued that the nature of the heads' responses to different episodes in their lives and the particular ways in which they conduct their day-to-day work make the application of the term 'spiritual dimension' intelligible and justifiable. The chapter includes an indication of how the research study's findings may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of spirituality in its association with primary school leadership than that which is available currently. In these ways, it is intended that the chapter will provide those insights necessary to respond to the research questions given in Chapter 1 that give focus to the study.

No attempt is made to capture the spiritual dimension as it emerged from the findings in a single comprehensive model. It would be very difficult to separate and categorise data and findings in the exclusive terms that a model of this kind requires. Indeed, such a model would risk oversimplifying and distorting the ambiguous, complicated phenomena that are revealed.

6.2 Problems of application: 'spiritual dimension'

To permit an assessment of the nature and extent of any spiritual dimension in the professional and personal lives of primary headteachers, it is necessary to justify the application of the term. After all, the use of 'spiritual dimension' in this context is contestable. It could be argued that what has emerged from the findings is no more than a series of portraits of highly developed personal, social and professional skills and that any claimed 'spiritual dimension' could be usefully and simply subsumed into the much less problematic 'personal-social' (Lambourn, 1996). However, such a move is difficult. Halstead (1997) contends that though the spiritual may be associated with the personal-social, it is more than that and is related to 'the deepest values and aspirations of the human spirit' (p.100).

Similarly, substituting 'the moral dimension' for the term appears ultimately unsatisfactory, though the two are intimately connected. The moral is inevitably imbued with issues of being as well as of doing; it is to do with personal qualities, virtues and values as much as principles for social and civic behaviour (Halstead and Pike, 2006). The spiritual is also to do with matters of being and so has a direct link to the moral (and in the same way to the personal-social) whilst not being reducible to or equivalent to that concept. One significant objection is that the 'moral dimension' on its own seems unlikely to encapsulate the shift, evident in the findings, when heads' reflections about the way that life is lived and should be lived (moral matters) moved to questions of more ultimate concern (the spiritual) (Wright, 2000).

Bernadette, for example, was disturbed by the inadequacies of parenting practices in one family which, in turn, prompted difficult questions for her about the existence of divine care and love; in her anxiety, the moral gave way to the spiritual. She reflected:

We've got all these people who are seeing this and we're not intervening and I find that very difficult. Just as I find that a God who would allow the Passover to happen and to kill the first born but I have to accept that I'm not going to understand everything. So that's something that I have to live with I think. (interview 1)

Neither is 'moral dimension' quite able to capture the dispositional and attitudinal intensification apparent in the findings. For McGhee (2003), the spiritual is connected to the moral through this notion of intensification. So, qualities that might be regarded as moral may attain the status of spiritual because they do not represent fixed possibilities, but are capable of development and of moving towards the transcendent through what he calls a 'spiral transcendence' (p.28). Using the human capacity for compassion, McGhee (2003) offers a personal example of such transcendence from within his Christian tradition; that of a gradual movement from his own human sense of compassion to that of Christ for all humankind through increased force and intensity. There is some evidence of such promptings towards compassionate intensification in the narratives of Dave and Rory. Bereavement seemed to propel them beyond professional detachment, managing their own emotions and those of others, into what some may call spiritual activity; a process analogous to that described by Boyle and Healy (2003) in their study of paramedics, though set in a less intensive context than that of the emotionally debilitating extremes that regularly confront emergency workers. Rory reported his own tears for a bereaved parent:

My feeling tends to be ... the person responding, whether it's the head or the teacher...it's about following the heart. Just have an honest open human response to whatever comes your way. I found myself a few weeks back, one of my dads had lost his wife. She died and he was in tears and I found myself in tears. (interview 1)

Dave was moved to tears during our first interview as he talked about the loss of a pupil's father and their shared grief. The experience reminded him of his own mother's death: 'So those moments move me and things that move me I remember' (interview 1). It compelled him to confront profound questions of mortality and life after death.

A link between the spiritual and the moral through the notion of moral purpose, roused by indignation, was also revealed through the findings. Anger itself was rarely evident, though Terry was resentful and harboured 'a little bit of anger' (interview 3) at the pressures of the job that, in his view, damaged his own family relationships and other heads' wellbeing. Dave was scornful at what was in his view the unnecessary inclusion of a deceased pupil's national test scores in Shore Close School's profile:

The SATS of a dead boy counted in my scores, what a joke. It really throws the whole system into total ridicule... (interview 2)

Such irritation or anger can be the cause of discord and damage, but it can prompt what some may see as spiritual action, for example self-sacrifice for the good of others. It may have a spiritual value, but it may not; much depends on the moral roots and purpose of the response provoked by frustration, simply, the extent to which it rouses what is best in the human spirit (Vernon, 2008). Terry's reflections on his own failure to sustain relationships, according to his narrative, increased his sensitivity to his colleagues' personal circumstances. Dave's irritation at the use of national test scores compelled him to ask questions about matters of ultimate worth and strengthened his sense of loving care.

Following from the above, it is argued that the use of the term 'spiritual' rather than 'moral' or 'personal-social' is justified in order to capture comprehensively not only the spirals of intensification (McGhee, 2003) and those moments when the head's identity and that of others is lost in the sense of unity that some may call transcendence (Tubbs, 2005) but also the heads' demeanours from which such intensification and transcendence may spring.

To add to the complexity, spiritual also has a 'chameleon-like quality' (Halstead, 1997, p.98) in that the term appears to take the hue of any associated noun or adjective such as 'spiritual home', or 'feminist spirituality'. Therefore, when combined with the work of primary headteachers, it takes on the colour of school leadership with all that that implies in terms of the qualities needed to lead and manage schools, such as authenticity, critical openness, respect for others and tolerance of diversity and challenge.

Some see the notion of 'dimension' used in conjunction with the spiritual as contentious in itself. Eade (2002) suggests that the term carries unhelpful connotations of measurement and Carrette and King (2005) argue that 'dimension' creates even more confusion in an already problematic area, seemingly denoting separateness and wholeness at the same time. However, such concerns seem to chime in the wrong register; any perceived untidiness may simply reveal the inevitable inadequacies in the language used to deal with the concept. Others have used the term 'spiritual dimension' without any such reservations. For example Priestley (2000), writing about education in schools, uses it in calling for the nurture of a form of thinking characterised, amongst other things, by respect for 'the human value of the person' (p.97). Halstead (1997) also uses 'spiritual dimension' to identify those aspects of education, particularly those associated with the arts, that tap into the depths of human consciousness and help pupils to avoid 'the passive acceptance of the sovereignty of Mammon' (p.100). In this chapter, whilst its problems are recognised, 'spiritual dimension' is accepted as a term in use. Its application is intended to draw attention to the place of what Halstead (1997, p.101) calls 'the domain of the human spirit' and its role in shaping the work of primary headteachers that emerged from the research study.

The use of the term in this way in some contexts is less controversial than others, for example in the context of heads' religious faith or practice, such as personal consciousness of the divine or personal prayer, perhaps associated with decision-making at difficult times in schools. However, its use in nonreligious contexts is contested, for example in the context of ways of being or living that do not suppose religious belief in themselves, but, for example, reveal human capacities for altruism and selflessness, which many would identify as spiritual qualities. Of course, life episodes could prompt both religiously-formed and nonreligious responses, one sometimes melding to the other. For example, Bernadette's wonder at the learning potential of a young child drew her simultaneously to contemplate the mark of the divine in human life. During a preliminary informal conversation before the third interview began, she remarked:

There is nothing better to remind you of God's work in the world than a young child when it first discovers something.

6.3 The spiritual dimension in the context of religious belief and practice

As already noted, the least contested use of the term 'spiritual dimension' to emerge from the findings is in a context of religious belief and practice, though religious commitment, in itself, is an ambiguous concept. The participating heads elected to include a general statement of their faith positions in their biographies and in their analyses of the beliefs and values that informed their leadership work. These were by no means universal or uniform: Rory was a committed Catholic, holding a traditional faith position; Margaret was a committed Christian following a more scripturally-based tradition; Bernadette's religious beliefs were rooted in the Catholic faith, though she could not accept Catholic teaching on key doctrinal matters and wrestled with serious doubts about the divinity of Christ; Peter had left the Anglican community for a time before returning; Terry regarded himself as having Christian beliefs and values but was, at the time of the project, no longer a committed member of a faith tradition and Dave remained unconvinced by any religious position, but insisted that his school's values had a broadly Christian base. For Margaret and Rory in particular, headship appeared to offer a way of living out their Christian lives and of sustaining their relationship with God. Margaret's narrative suggested that her school leadership was a secondary, though not unimportant, vocation; a means of serving God and making best use of the gifts and talents given to her by him (Hartnett and Kline, 2005):

Your life's not your own. God's got a purpose for you and it's not about guessing what that is, it's just about using your common sense, stuff that He's given you anyway and having a go at things that you think that perhaps this might be what He'd like you to do next and to use what He's given me. (interview 1)

With the exception of Dave, irrespective of the depth of their individual commitment to the Christian tradition, each head seemed to live with what could be seen as a consciousness of

the presence of the divine, albeit in different ways, and appeared to find support, hope and inspiration in their work through such consciousness.

Conceptually, such a religiously-based application of 'spiritual dimension' seems to occupy the common ground that lies between those who argue that a notion of spirituality separated from a theological perspective on life is vacuous (Thatcher, 1996; Sheldrake, 1999) and those who see meaning in nonreligious as well as religiously-based uses of the term (Hull, 2002; Alexander and McLaughlin, 2003). Of course, a religiously-based spirituality may be nurtured and prompted by sources other than religious ritual and practice. So the spiritual dimension for Rory was sustained through his religious practice and beliefs, including reflection on Biblical texts, prayer and regular attendance at Mass, but could be prompted in nonreligious contexts, for example, dealing with tensions between staff where he resolved to act in accordance with his Gospel values, though his actions surprised his staff colleagues:

...we sometimes have to be fools for Christ. I believe that sometimes...when it's foolish in the eyes of the world, but from the Christian perspective, it's the right thing to do.
(interview 2)

6.3.1 Prayer

Prayer, broadly defined as time set aside to seek guidance, support or reflect in the light of belief in the divine (Fraser, 2007), was the religious practice revealed most clearly through the findings. It seemed generally and in various ways to offer sustenance and support for the heads in their day-to-day work, with the exception of Dave. His meditations on ultimate questions prompted by personal and professional events, though profound, were not founded on religious belief.

However, faith and prayer did not always provoke a trusting confidence in the divine or provide reassurance. Bernadette was desolated by the loss of her son:

...so I think I lived for a couple of years with a void and I think that the shock to me, the faith shock to me was that I thought there would be something, I expected something to be there. I took my faith for granted and when it was tested there was emptiness. There wasn't even anger, so I didn't find much internally. (interview 2)

In contrast to its positive associations, such darker feelings and fears are arguably an aspect of the spiritual that is less often acknowledged, particularly in the context of school leadership. Yet it was from her own darkness that Bernadette came to understand and respond to the isolation of those members of her school's community who found themselves publicly alone, perhaps following a broken relationship:

One has to learn from these experiences – they can be negative experiences that can destroy you or they can be hurtful experiences that help to build you – give you greater

understanding. I suppose I grew up – it helped me mature...People talk a great deal about emotional intelligence. I think I wasn't any where near a level of empathy and understanding of the families and children that I work with until something shook my thoughts ...it took me a long time... I didn't grieve properly for a couple of years.
(interview 1)

Prayer was often mentioned in connection with decision-making. Petitionary prayers seeking guidance seemed to provide a space for heads to ponder the significant, challenging issues that needed to be dealt with; a means of reflecting on potential action in the light of personal beliefs. Such prayer, rather than prayer of praise or thanksgiving appeared to dominate headteachers' prayer lives. Yet prayer is not usually associated with decision-making processes in schools, where more technocratic, rational models seem to have a pervasive influence (Bush and Glover, 2003).

Alternative models seek to redress such apparent (and, in practice, unrealistic) neatness. Morley and Hoskins (2003) suggest that decision-making is really about handling dilemmas; it is to do with identifying and understanding the intricate relationship between different dilemmas rooted in context, relationships, values and beliefs and the ability to negotiate an acceptable path through them. Understandably, then, decision-making for the research study's heads could be a stressful business. Prominent amongst the causes of distress were anxieties about the effect that their decisions could have on others. This finding confirms that reported by Ginsberg and Gray Davies (2003), following their study of high-school principals and superintendents from one state and community college leaders and deans of schools/colleges of education across the USA. They comment: 'Most prominently, there was anxiety concerning the affect their decisions would have on others' lives' (p.272). Similarly, Crawford's (2004) small-scale study of English primary headteachers' emotions suggests that the occasions of particular emotional intensity for heads are all 'people related' (p.23), for example making decisions relating to staff redundancy or the implementation of capability procedures. Not surprisingly, given that emotionally intense episodes may call forth spiritual activity (Boyle and Healy, 2003), the findings suggest that making difficult decisions with major relational implications often prompted prayer or deep reflection on personal spiritual values. Prayer seemed to confirm the heads' values and clarify action in the light of those values, in particular the primacy given to the emotional and academic wellbeing of the child. What seems clear is that the decision-making process was infused with emotions and so was shaped by those things that mattered to the heads and had formed them, including their beliefs and values. In other words, it involved character, matters of being and becoming, and so, for some, is intimately connected to the spiritual.

Communal prayer, that is prayer said during times of collective worship or petitionary prayers offered by its community for the good of the school, appeared to be regarded by Bernadette, Rory and Margaret as an important means of creating and sustaining a sense of joint purpose and trust. However, for the heads themselves, prayer offered by their school's community

seemed to provide an additional, powerful affirmation of the work of school and of their leadership. Margaret commented:

...house groups have always prayed me through allsorts; I'm sure there are people at church who pray for us regularly – I know there are. (interview 2)

Communal petitionary prayer prior to OfSTED's inspection of All Saints' seemed to reinforce a moral alignment between Margaret and her community. She reflected on the demands of the inspection process and what had sustained her through it:

It was very hard work actually. We had a lot of people praying for us. Actually, what we did pray was that the inspectors would see the right things. (interview 2)

Such 'moral closeness' (Hargreaves, 2001, p.1067) appeared to reinforce Margaret's own sense of purpose and so provided a source of positive, encouraging, emotional support. When such affirmation was made through prayer, however, such moral closeness became spiritual closeness, reflecting not only the relational bonds within the school's community, but also those between the community and the divine. So, not only were Margaret's leadership activities affirmed, but also her sense of her vocational call to headship from God.

6.4 The spiritual dimension in nonreligious contexts

A more controversial application of 'spiritual dimension' is that in contexts that do not presuppose religious belief or commitment. Much depends on how the spiritual dimension is understood. The findings revealed human qualities informing the heads' lives and work that did not in themselves presuppose religious belief or practice but which some may nevertheless call spiritual, for example, Dave's compassionate identification with the bereaved members of his community or the intense connectedness with natural phenomena that permeated Terry's educational thinking:

I'm very much a spiritual person in terms of the awe and wonder of the earth that we live on. And I think that has translated itself in my philosophy towards education that links in with appreciation of the world around us and first hand learning. (interview 2)

In this sense, the spiritual dimension may be viewed as 'phenomenological' (Van Hess, 1996, p.1) that is, as a matter of how life is lived, a way of being, rather than presupposing belief in God or membership of a faith community.

The findings suggest that a nonreligious spiritual dimension may be discerned in two ways: through what may be called unconscious religious resonances that do not in themselves necessitate religious belief and through each head's demeanour and sensibility to the lives of others revealed through a multitude of small, unremarkable, acts of kindness, love or selflessness.

A nonreligiously-based spiritual dimension may also be glimpsed through what may be considered to be nonreligious resonances of the more consciously religiously-based spirituality of those heads who were believers. Dave had seemingly rejected the possibility of the existence of God. However, what could be called a nonreligious resonance of his living with a sense of the ultimate or sacred that is apparent in other, more religiously-convinced heads could be discerned in what may be described as his 'holding out for a deeper meaning to life' (Holland, 2004, p.41). For example, Dave's actions following the unexpected death of a pupil, throwing pebbles into the sea while calling the pupil's name and later erecting a memorial bench in the school's grounds, could be seen as nonreligious resonances of an association with the deceased pupil that in a religious context may take the form of prayer for the dead which is normally linked to belief in an afterlife (Stroebe, 2004).

Each head, irrespective of a religious commitment, sought through his/her actions and attitudes to give primacy to pupils' care, variously cast as offering support and protection for pupils, particularly at difficult times and intentions to foster pupils' social, emotional and academic welfare (Nias, 1997; Hayes, 2006). The findings suggest, though, that such care was regarded as more than a professional duty and included, for some, explicit references to love. It is this spiral into loving, with its implications of deep personal involvement, altruism and lack of self-regard that seemed to intensify care and deepen its spiritual potential. Nias (1997) offers a number of historical reasons why primary heads and teachers expect to 'care', amongst them the religious origins of teacher training and a longstanding perception of primary teaching as a form of service to others. Inescapably, in this way, the work of primary headteachers seems to be infused with what some may see as a spiritual demeanour. For heads who are Christian believers, love of God and love of others are, of course, intimately connected.

Interestingly, the findings reveal other ways in which heads relate to their communities. Dave and Rory's contrasting responses to dealing with bereavement illuminate differences in their approach to communal meaning-making at difficult times. Rory's Catholic community seemed to hold, in broad terms, a shared understanding of loss and had had the common experience of witnessing and reflecting upon the last days of a former priest. Rory felt that death should be acknowledged as a part of the human condition in the ongoing work of his school:

It's still an area of taboo for many of us and I feel very strongly that children – not that you've constantly got to be reminding them of it – it should be an acknowledgement in the grand scale of things; about what life is and where it's going to end. (interview 3)

In this sense, for him, death appeared to provide an affirmation of his faith. He appeared to have little difficulty in reflecting on the meaning of life and death, in accordance with his Catholic beliefs, with pupils and staff. Rory seemed to see that its networking processes provided a means for the community to make sense of painful events (Macpherson and Vann,

1996) and had shared his responses to the death of his wife with members of his parish community as a part of the activities of a diocesan support network, hoping to help them to find both meaning and hope in his experiences.

In contrast, Dave's accounts of his handling of two bereavements in school seem to confirm that saw his role in such difficult situations as one of sensitive emotional management rather more definitely than developing spiritual awareness. He sought to control his own feelings, generate calm across his community and return the school to its normal patterns of life as quickly as possible. His disappointed response to the unplanned leaking of news of the second death, that disrupted his emotional management plan, supports this reading of his role. Dave's strategy for handling bereavement in school in the future, though valuable, seemed largely procedural. Nevertheless, his actions following the first death seemed to work positively for him, helping him to accept the loss, confirming his shared humanity with the deceased pupil and his family and affirming his leadership and care for his community at a difficult time.

Dave and Rory's responses to bereavement may have wider implications for understanding school leadership. The death of a member of the school's community seems to raise heads' consciousness of themselves and their role. At least in part, this self-awareness seems to require that they examine their place in their schools' communities, particularly in terms of the expectations of knowledge and understanding of death that their communities may have of them. Dave and Rory seemed to interpret these expectations in different ways. This, in turn, raises further issues about how heads may reconstruct existing communal perceptions and about their educative relationships with their communities more generally (Macpherson and Vann, 1996). These are discussed further in Chapter 7.

6.5 Episodic intensification

From time to time, their spiritual disposition to loving care was intensified, particularly when the heads encountered bereavement. Such episodic intensification transformed an underlying attitude of kindness and respect for the human worth of individual members of their communities. The heads moved from care to what could be called compassion as they shared the distress of those who were suffering, aware of human interconnectedness (McGhee, 2003). For Christian believers compassion is expressed through works of mercy and requires responsive action (Fox, 1990). Dave attempted to arrange a positive, affirmative recognition of her participation in the *Race for Life* by a young pupil whose father had died and Rory tried to relieve the distress of others by sharing the hope that he had found at the end of his own suffering. In the Christian tradition, God is immanent in human suffering (Fox, 1990) so authentic love of God (a sign of the spiritual) is inextricably linked to loving and helping others. Many would argue that for non-believers, such a loss of self in the relieving

the distress of others is the deepest expression of spirituality; loving care for others is what makes us fully human (Hull, 1996). It seems that compassion, altruistic love or devotion to the wellbeing of others, is what links Dave's nonreligiously-based spirituality and the more religiously-based spirituality of other heads in the research study.

However, compassionate action appears to challenge the notion of professional distance contained in those models of professionalism that seem to demand emotional detachment (Hargreaves, 2001). The professionalism that Hargreaves (2001) has in mind requires that professionals avoid 'emotional entanglements with their clients' problems' and so 'maintain a professional distance from them' and is modelled on the 'traditionally male preserves of medicine and law' (p.1069). Therefore, for Hargreaves (2001), though teachers and headteachers are expected to care for members of the school's community, they are expected to do this in a 'clinical and detached way' (p.1069); in other words, to keep their professional distance. Yet the research data revealed caring that moved heads to compassionate action and simultaneously drew them away from such professional detachment and closer to their communities, at least personally and in private. Dave was moved to tears by events in school that awoke memories of the loss of his mother and Rory shared the distress of a bereaved parent; each moving beyond 'professional distance'. Perhaps an emotionally-detached model of professionalism simply underplays the vocational aspects of teaching and headship that carry with them an expectation of caring and recognition that the job will include, rightly, affective involvement in the lives of others (Carr, 2003). It over-simplifies the complexity of heads' relationships where personal closeness and professional distance seem to be held, at such emotionally intense moments, in precarious balance.

But, of course, providing unlimited loving care can be problematic (Nias, 1997). Giving loving care to pupils did not appear to compromise the proper learning aims and concern for educational progress of the research schools. Rather, it created personal and professional dilemmas for the heads themselves. They knew that the demands of loving care had to be bounded to preserve their own emotional energies and effectiveness as heads. Terry and Peter, in particular, in their different ways were aware of this and the problems that some may see as a spiritual disposition could pose for them. Terry reflected:

It's important because I think the pressures of headship, the pressures of the hours that you put in has probably had a negative impact on maintaining a positive relationship with those who are nearest and dearest. I include my children to some extent; that maybe I was putting other people's children ahead of my own at times, going away on residential, all this sort of thing and the energies that you put in, and sometimes the energies that you put in a demanding week at school or a day at school and you come home; you almost don't want to know your own children for a while. It has had some sort of impact. (interview 2)

Above all, the spiritual dimension in school leaders' lives is highly relational. Both the religious and nonreligious elements of the spiritual dimension seemed most readily discernable through the various relationships that engaged the heads and particularly in their attempts to maintain the integrity of their own professional identities through their relationships. For the heads that were committed Christians, their witness to Gospel values was found in the quality of relationships in school.

6.6 Opportunities for transcendence

The findings suggest that the day-to-day work of heads in itself provides opportunities for transcendence, that is, for heads to go beyond perceptions that were already held and experience the world in a different way (Hull, 2002). Such opportunities, for example Rory's tears following an encounter with a recently widowed parent, permitted individual identities to be lost; a profound experience of a common human unity that it could be argued, moved into the spiritual dimension (McGhee, 2003; Tubbs, 2005).

The heads could not anticipate or prepare themselves completely for the tensions and problems that came their way, but they seemed to find (after some pain) both self-knowledge and fulfilment through their work. Each head appeared to have developed the ability to learn from their difficulties and to overcome them. In this sense, headship itself may be seen as 'an opportunity for self-transcendence' (Newby 1994, p.24) that is to develop a sense of professional identity and personal worth that transcends the perceptions that heads may have had of themselves, such as Terry's, Bernadette's and Margaret's initial doubts about their abilities to do the job. Shared humour, of course, is rich with potential to disturb the accepted way of looking at things and punctuated many exchanges in the study schools (Johnson, 2005).

6.7 The spiritual dimension: dissent and turbulence

With the exception of Margaret, the heads offered little evidence of conscious, overt dissent towards the professional imperatives and regulatory regimes that prescribed their work, though Rory, Peter and Dave were highly critical of secondary phase selection procedures and Terry of what he perceived to be the unfairness of academic performance measures on schools, like Rising Mead, in difficult and disadvantaged areas.

However, the heads offered what some may see as powerful dissidence of a different kind through the culture of their schools, characterised by an insistence on 'a positive anthropology of the person' (McLaughlin, 2002, p.129), through compassion, tolerance and a commitment to social justice. The highly relational nature of the spiritual dimension revealed through the findings reflects Hay's (2001) suggestion that 'relational consciousness' (p.108) underpins

spirituality, because it is that consciousness which permits the possibility of a relationship with the divine or, for non-believers, a relationship with 'the Other' (p.108) however that may be conceived. On this reading, an absence of the spiritual in the practice of school leadership is manifested through self-regard, separation and isolation from pupils and colleagues; the lack of respectful, honest relationships that Margaret saw as its key signifier. This suggests that the spiritual dimension has a largely unrecognised potential for disturbance in that it challenges those readings of spirituality that emphasise its individual rather than relational nature and a commercial and economic climate that appears to promote self-interest. In this sense, according to Hay (2001), the spiritual could be regarded as countercultural. Similarly, prayer, though not generally recognised as such by the heads themselves, could be regarded as a dissenting aspect of the spiritual dimension in their lives, because it offers space for time spent with a consciousness of the divine (Fraser, 2007) and so an escape from an educational culture in which performance and regulation are seemingly omnipresent.

6.8 Summary

The project's findings offer some support for West-Burnham's (2002a) conceptual model of spirituality and school leadership discussed at length in Chapter 2, particularly his contention that spirituality can be nurtured and discerned through the nature of relationships in school, especially the school's concern for the dignity of each of its members. However, the spiritual dimension appears to be richer and more complex than he suggests. For example, he does not recognise that the spiritual of itself can be a source of countercultural dissent in a school context that is dominated by a market rather than a public service based hegemony. West-Burnham's (2002a) conceptualisation seems almost entirely positive. He pays only limited attention to those darker events that stimulated profound reflection and changes in their professional understandings described by the heads. Indeed Rory, a committed Catholic, saw his spirituality not just as a preparation for life and work, West-Burnham's (2002a) apparent perception, but also for death.

It is suggested then, in the context of primary headship, it may be possible to outline three broad, sometimes overlapping, descriptive characteristics of the spiritual dimension from the findings. These general characteristics may be discerned in both religiously and nonreligiously-based spirituality. These are that it is:

relational (shaped and sustained by and through a variety of relationships, including, for some headteachers, a relationship with the divine);

dispositional and attitudinal (discerned in heads' ways of being and in the ways that they think about and regard human life, which in themselves may or may not be nurtured by religious commitment or belief); and

fluid and multi-layered (heads' day-to-day dispositions and attitudes have a capacity for episodic intensification, prompting, at times that are emotionally demanding, the selflessness and compassion that some regard as deeply spiritual).

The findings indicate that what may be described as a spiritual dimension can be discerned in primary headteachers' professional and personal lives, existing in a complex interplay of emotions, relationships and what may be called spiritual promptings and that it has a significant influence on the practice of primary headship. It impacts on the inner lives of headteachers, perhaps sustaining them in difficult times, and on their relationships with others in the emotionally-laden context of the primary school. Therefore, it looks both inwards and outwards (Halstead, 1997). Grappling with difficult dilemmas, often rooted in conflicting values or moral positions, emerged as a key part of headship. Learning to share the perspectives of others, essential to dealing with such tensions (Armstrong, 2009), requires what some would see as spiritual capacities for authenticity, openness and imagination whether these are religiously-based or not and has important implications for the conduct and preparation of school leaders. These are discussed more fully in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides: detailed responses to the research questions given in Chapter 1, describing the nature of the spiritual dimension in its association with primary headship and its connection to headteachers' work; an account of the significance of the findings for the understanding of headship; an overview of the implications of the findings for headteachers, for those concerned with headteachers' development and for further research.

The research questions which give focus to the study are:

1. What is the nature of the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers?
2. Is there a discernible connection between such a spiritual dimension and headteachers' work in primary schools?

7.2 Responses to the research questions

Responses to these questions are complex and nuanced; much depends on how 'the spiritual dimension' is understood. For this reason, the problematic nature of the term and its different readings were examined in depth in Chapter 2. Throughout, the research project admitted diverse, perhaps conflicting, images of the spiritual dimension. This approach was intended to leave open the possibility of a wide range of critical and creative interpretations of the term. Nevertheless, sufficient commonality emerged from the findings, in spite of the differences between the headteachers, to enable a range of broad, descriptive characteristics of the spiritual dimension to be discerned. It is on these characteristics, rather than any attempted model or definition, that these conclusions are based. Inevitably, the conclusions are provisional and contestable.

Not surprisingly, the project confirmed the impossibility of separating the spiritual dimension discerned in each head's personal life from that glimpsed in each professional life. Its findings require heads to be seen as 'whole beings' (Priestley, 2005, p.212), not as fractured identities, however appealing to those seeking to understand school leadership such analysis may be. Within the research study, each headteacher drew easily from both personal and professional experiences in their biographical narratives. They described times when they had to reach deeply into their personal resources, occasionally acting outside normal regulatory procedures or current expectations of their professional roles to cope with demanding

situations as well as personal, transformational events that had changed their ways of looking at the world and headship radically.

7.2.1 *The nature of the spiritual dimension*

The findings of the research project indicate that the use of 'spiritual dimension' in its association with primary headteachers' personal and professional lives is justifiable. It seems that the spiritual dimension, as it emerged from the research data, cannot be subsumed into the moral, personal or social aspects of these lives, though they are connected. The principal objections to such equivalences are those of *profundity* and *intensification*. 'Moral dimension' on its own seems unlikely to encapsulate the shift in thinking about the way that life is lived and should be lived (moral matters) to questions of more ultimate concern (the spiritual), for example, that Bernadette reported (Wright, 2000). Disturbed by the inadequacies of parenting practices that she had witnessed, she was compelled to confront difficult and profound questions about the existence of divine care and love; in her anxiety, the moral gave way to the spiritual. Similarly, neither 'moral' nor 'personal/social' (Lambourn, 1996) are quite able to capture the dispositional and attitudinal intensification apparent in the findings, for example as care became compassion as Dave and Rory dealt with bereavement and confronted important questions of mortality and life after death. In short, attempts at equivalence cannot encapsulate the potential spirals of transcendence (McGhee, 2003) evident in the data that help to make the term 'spiritual dimension' intelligible in the context of the headteachers' lives.

The spiritual dimension also includes both religiously and nonreligiously-based ways of being. They are addressed separately below to provide sufficient 'conceptual control' (Priestley, 2005, p.211) for discussion, though they exist in a complex and dynamic relationship, one informing the other.

7.2.2 *A religiously-based and nonreligiously-based spiritual dimension*

The spiritual dimension may be religiously-based, characterised by the consciousness of the divine revealed in different ways in most of the heads' lives. Its religious form was most apparent in the practice of prayer, broadly defined as time used to seek guidance, support or reflect in the light of such consciousness (Fraser, 2007). Personal prayer was associated particularly with a search for guidance in decision-making and seemed to act as a reminder of the significant, challenging issues that heads needed to deal with; a means of reflecting on potential action in the light of personal beliefs. Communal prayer, on the other hand, appeared to strengthen the moral and spiritual alignment of the schools' communities (Hargreaves, 2001), particularly in faith-based schools. Such alignment, in turn, seemed to affirm the work of the heads themselves and offer them support and encouragement.

A religiously-based spiritual dimension may also be glimpsed more obliquely through religious resonances in nonreligious events that do not in themselves necessitate belief, for example Dave's actions following the unexpected death of a pupil; throwing pebbles into the sea while calling the pupil's name and later erecting a memorial bench in the school's grounds. In an equivalent religious context such acts of remembrance may take the form of prayer for the dead, normally linked to belief in an afterlife (Stroebe, 2004).

A nonreligiously-based spiritual dimension may be characterised as a matter of how life is lived, rather than presupposing belief in God or membership of a faith community (Van Hess, 1996). For school leaders, it is connected with personal being, rather than professional knowing and doing (Priestley, 2005). In particular, the participant heads had entered teaching with the expectation (of themselves) that they would care holistically for their pupils and members of their schools' communities (Nias, 1997). Such care can spiral into deep personal involvement, altruism and lack of self-regard and be transformed with episodic intensity to compassion and transcendence. It is through the capacity for care that a nonreligiously-based spirituality in school leadership is most readily revealed.

Above all, the spiritual dimension is refracted through the range of relationships that inhabit the head's life: relationships with the divine; with the natural world, but principally with the school's community. It is in the complexities of human interconnectedness that the spiritual dimension in heads' lives is shaped and expressed. Moreover, its relational nature suggests that it has a largely unrecognised potential for disturbance in that it challenges both those readings of the term that cast spirituality as individual matter, separate from worldly concerns and a societal climate that appears to promote self-interest. In this sense, the spiritual dimension, for example as it is expressed through prayer, could be regarded as countercultural (Hay, 2001; Fraser, 2007).

7.2.3 Descriptive characteristics of the spiritual dimension

In summary, it is possible to outline three broad, descriptive characteristics of the nature of the spiritual dimension in the personal and professional lives of primary headteachers. These general characteristics may be discerned in both religiously and nonreligiously-based spirituality. They are that it is:

relational. It is shaped and sustained by and through a variety of interconnected relationships, including, for some headteachers, a relationship with the divine;

given expression through dispositions and attitudes; that is, through a complex interplay of cognition, behaviour and emotion. It may be discerned in heads' ways of being and in

the ways that they think about and regard human life which in themselves may or may not be nurtured by religious commitment or belief;

fluid, dynamic and multi-layered. Heads' day-to-day dispositions and attitudes hold within them a capacity for episodic intensification, prompting, at times that are emotionally demanding, the loss of self, altruism and connectedness that some regard as deeply spiritual; a spiral of transcendence (McGhee, 2003).

7.3 The significance of the research findings

The research findings add to the growing understanding of the spiritual dimension of school leadership and offer a biographical contextualisation that appears to have had only limited consideration in previous studies of spirituality in its association with headship. In particular, the findings suggest that headship itself can offer opportunities for seeing and responding to the human condition in different and intensely interconnected ways that may be described as spiritual. In this sense, spiritual activities are an integral and appropriate, not an additional, part of headship; an argument that has significant implications for the discourse of school leadership.

The data-gathering approach, combining biographical narrative, observation and scrutiny of documentation employed in the research project does not appear to have been used previously in this way in research of this kind. Yet the nature of the spiritual demands holism; if, as the findings suggest, the spiritual is 'connected with being' (Priestley, 2005, p.211) a biographical approach to such research is necessary. Simply, Bernadette's account of the depth of her understanding of the isolation of young mothers in her school's community makes less sense without the insights she provided into the devastation of her own isolation from God.

7.4 Implications for headteachers and headteachers' development: cultivation of the inner life

The participant heads' attempts to understand the religious and moral beliefs of others as well as their efforts to grapple with profound existential questions seem to bring both resilience and authenticity to their work. Therefore, the research study's findings provide support for West-Burnham's (2009) plea for school leaders to create (or to be allowed to create) space for 'rigorous thinking, analysis, review and reflection' (p.39) as a means of cultivating what he calls 'the inner life' (p.36). It is through such reflection that heads may be helped to construct the 'deep sense of humanity' (p.39) and moral and spiritual security that are associated with effective school leadership.

Such security may help heads as they encounter the different, possibly contradictory opinions, meanings and beliefs found in their schools' communities. Inevitably, to engage with questions of value and make progress with problems of antagonism or conflict seems to require what Armstrong (2009) describes as 'learning to inhabit each other's point of view with honesty and generosity' (p.30); that is, empathetic insight nurtured through a cultivated inner life.

Such intense awareness of individual differences, what West-Burnham (2009, p.38) calls the 'uniqueness of each life', may also support heads as they deal with intensely emotional episodes such as bereavement in school. Sensitive reflection may raise their awareness of individual differences in responding to grief, including their own. So, for heads, part of the process of leading a school's community through grief may be by allowing diverse meanings to be shared, perhaps through memorial rituals, and not attempting to accede to expectations (of themselves or that others may have of them) that somehow they should have more knowledge and understanding of loss than community members.

7.5 Implications for headteachers and headteachers' development: spiritual activity as an integral part of headship

The spiritual dimension in its association with school leadership seems to be expressed primarily through responsive action which may, in turn, stimulate reflection. Indeed, what may be seen as spiritual activity may well precede the rigorous, meditative thinking described above. The research study suggests that such spiritual activity is prompted most evidently at emotionally demanding times: it appears to help heads to deal with and come to terms with such episodes and events. Boyle and Healy (2003) make much the same argument relating to the use value of spiritual work in their study of paramedics, though they concentrate on its potential for restoring equilibrium and so, maintaining personal wellbeing. For heads though, spiritual activities are more subtly complex in their restorative functions. For example, Dave's spiritual activity, prompted by an unexpected bereavement in school, seemed to work positively for him in different ways: simultaneously confirming his shared humanity with the deceased pupil and his family; helping Dave himself to accept the loss and affirming his leadership and care for his community. In this sense the findings argue that spiritual activity is a normal and appropriate undertaking for headteachers.

The literature on school leadership has only belatedly begun to recognise the importance of school leaders' abilities to engage with their own and others' emotions if they are to develop successful schools (Beatty and Brew, 2004). In the culture of schooling, emotions are largely assumed to be in need of management or control (Nias, 1996) and rarely discussed openly or in depth except in cases of stress or burnout (Crawford, 2004). Given the association of emotions with spirituality, it is not surprising that spiritual activities, for example prayer or meditation on profound existential questions prompted by those emotionally intense episodes

and events that punctuate life in schools, are also neglected and largely excluded from the discourse of school leadership.

For those concerned with the development and sustenance of headteachers and for heads themselves, the findings have the benefit of normalising the place of the spiritual in heads' work and therefore, legitimising the language of the spirit in professional debate.

There are dangers though. The spiritual dimension still defies definition and remains intangible, unpredictable and mysterious. In one sense, its limited recognition is its strength, offering some protection from the possible reductionism and codification that official scrutiny may bring. It could even be argued that more recognition of the spiritual dimension in school leadership, particularly if it led to a search for so-called useful applications, may dilute its power to remind those concerned with headteachers' preparation and development of the more elusive and non-rational elements of primary headship.

7.6 Implications for research

The research study confirmed that revealing the spiritual in its association with headship requires a complex process of what may be called layered discernment, based on narrative and judgement (Priestley, 2005) as well as relational sensitivity on the part of the researcher. Observations of headteachers in their everyday work provided a useful common grounding and a number of contextual insights which informed the series of research interviews. They also offered non-verbal clues to the spiritual dimension, for example through shared laughter or comforting gestures. However, discerning spirituality indirectly through nonverbal action remains highly problematic, perhaps permitting undue weight to be given to investigations drawing on interview-based data of different kinds that may simply reflect the perspectives of the more spiritually articulate participants in research studies and privilege religious language and concepts. There is a need for more explorations of nonverbal expressions of spirituality (see, for example, Berryman, 2001; Johnson, 2005).

Conducting research of this kind inevitably makes emotional demands on the researcher, dealing as it does with participants' life experiences in an intimate way (see Chapter 3). The process may raise feelings of deep anxiety and insecurity (as well as excitement) in researchers, though these do not appear to have received the same attention as the emotional wellbeing of research participants. More studies, similar to that of Widdowfield (2000) of the ways in which these experiences may shape researchers' approaches as well as their interpretation of data are needed.

Perhaps though, researching the spiritual makes personal demands in other ways. Hay (Hay with Nye, 2006) describes what he calls 'the spiritual dimension of qualitative research' (p.90)

in the context of his research (with Nye) into children's spirituality, though the problems he identifies arose during this research project and have implications for further research into spirituality in its association with school leadership. He concludes (p.91) that the complexity of the research situation, the relational sensitivity and the flexibility needed in research into the spiritual combine to ensure that the researcher cannot be a 'neutral sounding board'. For him a more appropriate analogy is to consider the 'total awareness' of the researcher as 'as if it were an instrument engaged in understanding and interpreting' the data that emerges as a result of the bond created with the participant. The process is, for him, a 'matter of holistic awareness', so the research skills needed have a close affinity with 'spiritual awareness'. In this sense, undertaking research of this kind requires that researchers undertake their own spiritual journey.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview 1: 18th July 2006

Margaret: All Saints' Church of England Primary School.

- Stephen: Just to remind you that this is entirely confidential. Please stop the tape as you wish if you don't want to ...
- Could we start talking...really about the beginning of your personal background before you decided to enter teaching: home; family; community and so on?
- Margaret: Typical working class, middle class family in [town].
- S: I know it well (laughter)
- M: Quite a few teachers in the family, but I had no intention of being a teacher...teachers or bankers, actually. Family very involved in local amateur dramatics and church going... yes, that's about it really. Quite a full education... first person in our bit of the family to go to university.
- S: You are the first person?
- M: In our immediate bit of family, yes.
- S: To go to university?
- M: My mum was twins, so if she'd only been one, she'd have gone to university, but her sister went to music college so she stayed at home.
- S: Are there any particular events that stand out in that period – and I do know [town] rather well?
- M: I quite liked school.
- S: That was in [town]?
- M: Yes, at the girls' high school. I think there was quite a significant moment when comprehensive education came in when I was in the third year there. It was with the boys' grammar school and that was nice, the whole kind of co-education thing. The timing of that was good. So you got your secondary school bit started and then you could have a bit more fun when the boys were there too. People talked slightly differently. It got a lot more interesting just in terms of spark and people having a sense of humour, actually.
- S: So this was the grammar school in [town]?
- M: Yes.
- S: Anything else that stands out?
- M: Stuff to do with amateur dramatics was great because I was taken along to that before I could walk. There was a lot of music, as well actually as a family and at school... loads of music, so there's a whole kind of social package that goes with that too.
- S: You played?

- M: Yes, I joined in with things when we had Gilbert and Sullivan productions at school. That was fun.
- S: Were you a member of a faith community at that time?
- M: I was church organist.
- S: And then you decided to enter teaching. Was there anything that was going on in your home and in your school that pointed you in the way to teaching? I think you said earlier on you really had no intention of teaching.
- M: That's right, I didn't. I did a PGCE so it was quite a long time before I decided to have a go at teaching.
- S: Your first degree was in?
- M: *Margaret named her degree subject. At the time of the interview, Margaret was involved in a local authority curricular initiative related to this subject area. The subject area is not identified to preserve her anonymity and that of her school.* I did it because I liked it.
- S: Where was that?
- M: [names university] in London. I think I was quite well taught and enjoyed it a lot and did it because I was interested in it. I did get good results but it wasn't one of those 'do it because you're best at it'. It was kind of no, I just want to find out more about it and spend longer doing it. I'd never been to [country] until the Easter of the year that I actually did the year abroad because it's a long way from [town] to [country] (laughter).
- S: Yes it is...getting to somewhere where you can get a connection to [country] (laughter).
- M: Yes and knowing you're going to like it when you get there. I mean you don't take risks if you haven't got much money, do you?
- S: You went from the grammar school in [town] to do [subject]?
- M: Well, we had this sixth form college. They took the sixth forms away when they went comprehensive, so I did two years there.
- S: So this was in...?
- M: In [town]. Oh, it would have been ... '77 to '79.
- S: That's when you were in the sixth form?
- M: Yes, which didn't really suit me. I was a bit more institutionalised and it took me a long time to settle and you can't risk that when you're doing A levels really.
- S: Too much freedom then?
- M: I didn't understand the structure. I could cope with the freedom. Also, lack of relationship I think... all these people teaching.
- S: Was it very big?
- M: It was reasonably big and it was very impersonal and I didn't have an awful lot of confidence that people knew who they were dealing with. So in terms of

advice and future and stuff like that, I got talked into doing Oxbridge. Again, I didn't mind very much. People make assumptions don't they about - OK - what kind of person you are? That was through, via English, and I didn't really want to do English at university. Certainly not at Oxbridge because it seemed an awful lot of old English stuff, not much modern and I didn't want to do that but I was kind of talked into it. I mean, it was quite interesting because I had extra lessons all on my own. Which was good, I mean it was useful stuff and there's a breadth now in things I understand because of that. It was a bit of a distraction really, but there was a relationship there with this one particular teacher and she was great. I think she was a good teacher but in terms of overall career planning that sort of thing didn't really fit together. In my tutor group I had a tutor that decided that I was lazy for some reason (laughs). I never did lazy at school, ever. It took a whole year to work out that she'd read me wrong. It was only when my parents went to meet with her that it was 'it sounds like the completely wrong person'. So that was an uncomfortable experience, whereas my brother who's younger than me who spent four years in several goes at A levels and loved it there and was the life and soul of the students' union and it was just his kind of thing. I just survived really; I didn't like it very much. Uncomfortable.

S: So you have a brother?

M: Three and a half years younger, yes.

S: You haven't got a sister?

M: No, just him.

S: What then persuades you to go from your [subject] degree at [university] to become a teacher?

M: Became a Christian in my first year of university from a sort of nominal churchy background. Nobody pointed out to me, ever, that it's about making a decision for yourself. I honestly didn't know that. So, you know, I think I was probably thinking I was in on a family ticket, I don't know, I'd never been faced with a choice before and they had a mission in my first year at university. People were just talking about relationship with Jesus and I thought they were going to ask me about it and I can remember feeling really uncomfortable. What I was going to say if they asked me?... So it all started there really. I went away and did something about that and then I was doing this [subject] degree and (pause) I kind of had vague ideas about what I wanted to do following on from that but I only had the one [subject area] so that kind of limited the options a little bit. I didn't think I was terribly good at it actually but I was also really enjoying it. But, the whole kind of direction thing changed, when I became a Christian because it was kind of, right well here I am, where do you want me? And it's just gone on like that really, which is why I'm here now. There's lots of bits in between. That was in the first year of university. The second, sorry, third year, I spent abroad and what I was doing there was... I was an assistant in a secondary school and loved it.

S: So being an assistant...?

M: Yes (pause). That whole year was such a big adventure in terms of relationship with God and I was a very long ... well I was down in the [region of country] so couldn't go home. Actually, I don't think you should go home. If you've gone there for a year you should ...you know ...become immersed properly.

It was just a question of learning to trust God on your own and really stepping out and pushing doors and relying on him and those sorts of things and I just

loved that teaching. I was teaching groups of children right through from first year up until sixth form but it was the little ones, not the second year they were, the first years didn't come in. I used to have a group on a Tuesday of little ones, eleven/twelve year olds and every time they had a test, the group changed, depending on [if] you did well in the test and I just used to love those Tuesday afternoons because they used to come in and have conversations so they could practise saying things like 'What time is it?' I got really attached to them; I used to love those Tuesday afternoons. It was things like that that I thought there's something in this ... I really like this, perhaps I ought to apply to teach [subject] in a junior school, that sort of thing, I could use the [subject] there. So following on from that, when I got back because the teaching application stuff has to go in before everything else anyway, I thought, I'll have a go at that but also apply for places where it's a limited number so that that'll screen you really well because I wanted to have a go at this but I want to be sure that this was the right thing for me. I got in, they were doing a PGCE course at [name of college], fifteen places in the first year and I got in on the first round so I took that as confirmation that that was the right thing to do.

S: If I could just take you back to this, what turned out to be quite a significant event in your life, this encounter in the first year of university. Was it a sort of, voluntary thing? You saw a poster and thought, 'I'd like to go along to that'?

M: There was a girl in the second year who'd already been really friendly towards me and my friend. She was doing [modern languages]. She kind of showed you where to go when you were new when you were lost, kind of thing. Then when it was during the mission week, it was either in her room or it was in somebody else's room where there was a group of them that had a coffee party type thing and they got one of the visiting speakers or helpers actually leading a discussion. So we went to this coffee type thing, because we really liked this girl and she'd always been nice to us, so genuine. We were sitting around in this room in college and the conversation literally was going around this, 'What's it like, this relationship with Jesus thing?' You could kind of feel that some people were slightly uncomfortable. That was the kind of stuff that it needed to give me a push but it really bothered me and I went away that weekend and I went to stay with my mum's twin sister who'd actually become a Christian a few years before through a neighbour of hers ... I was so uncomfortable with this. So it all came out and she just talked me through it. Some of it, I was thinking do northerners sound like this talking about Christianity? Is this just southerners? Is it just the way people do things down here? Everybody at [university] was quite southern and went home at weekends, I wasn't quite sure whether it was a cultural thing or whether this was genuine, so relating it to my aunty...

S: Do you think northern folks are pretty taciturn ...that they don't talk about...?

M: Yes, we don't talk about this sort of stuff and when we do, you don't talk about it with people that you don't know.

S: Oh, no, along with lots of other things (laughter)

M: It was easy for me to go and stay with my aunty because it was only two hours away, whereas it took forever to get to [town] and cost a lot.

S: So the time as an assistant and this event that you've described personally, the time as an assistant, was beginning to make you think, 'I quite like this, I'd like to do this'. So you go to [college]?

M: Yes, yes

- S: Is there anything else that was significant in shaping you? We talked a little bit about your professional journey if I can put it that way, but what's happening to Margaret personally, at this particular time? What's shaping you more personally? Shaping your views, perhaps on life as it is beginning to unfold before you?
- M: I think the becoming a Christian bit took over my life really, and it did. I mean it might sound really naive but it did all start to be a big adventure and just this ...proof that it worked because there were some huge risks there and lots of people wouldn't dare do any of that and I just felt really well looked after that year. I didn't know anybody when I got there, that kind of thing... so proof that that all worked.
- S: When you say risks?
- M: Well, not knowing anybody. I wasn't a terribly adventurous kind of person.
- S: Personal challenges?
- M: Yes, pitching in with the language when you've never lived there; a week in [city] with my mum the year... the Easter before I went. Long way from home, couldn't get back. I'm quite often homesick in new places. I wasn't sure how good I'd be at any of this: working, going from being a student to being responsible. Quite sheltered upbringing really in a way and not hugely sociable as a person... Quite good in my own company so not...All sorts of things just fell into place that year and I suppose you come back from a year like that, knowing a bit more about who you are having coped. You learnt lots in that sort of thing ... it's a very significant year and very valuable. The one thing that stood out in the teacher training course was, I actually felt I had an opinion which may sound really daft but with the sort of education that I had of being kind of question and answer and you're all clever people and we're not requiring you to think too much. I'm not sure how well I was taught to be honest but it suited me as a system but I could have gone further if I'd have been pushed a bit harder. It's just this idea that, we did an Education Studies bit, I think that was on Fridays and I really loved that because there were things there that actually I thought, 'I don't agree with that, I don't think that teacher should be doing that'. I didn't know that I'd got opinions about education and there were certain things, that looking back, I just see that without having had years of going to school because my mum's a teacher and that kind of thing. I loved it and I think we were really well taught on that course and those people listened to us and shaped things and just the idea that your opinion was valued. I just think that's really sad when you get to twenty two and that's the first time that it's happened to you.
- S: So you've gone on this huge adventure, life changing experience of going to [country]. Yet before that, because of your enthusiasm and your growing sense of sustenance from your Christian background, the adventure is almost taken on with a sense of trust that it's going to be alright?
- M: It's something about your life's not your own. God's got a purpose for you and it's not about guessing what that is. It's just about using your common sense, stuff that He's given you anyway and having a go at things that you think perhaps this might be what He'd like you to do next and to use what He's given me. So, it's been very much that kind of thing, like the [PGCE] course. I had a really lucky year that year. I was quite ill, the whole degree was on finals so when I arrived I was quite kind of ... tired out really and that was a strange year in lots of ways. Quite lonely in some ways but in other ways, again it was different way of proving that God is looking after me and all the sorts of support that you'd got used to in the university weren't there any more and you're about to be pitched into the real world so that was massively

good preparation. The next bit in terms of actually applying for jobs because I hadn't got a career plan sorted and I didn't need one I just needed to know the next step. I was quite happy. I actually said to God, 'I'm quite happy to apply for a job anywhere but I really want to be sure that it's the right place'. So I just applied for anything that jumped out at me and then, to cut a very long story short, I turned down a job in London that I was offered because I wasn't sure that it was the right place. They let me think about it over night and I had to say, 'I'm really sorry, I don't think it's right' and then I was rung up by a teacher in [city] asking me to interview for a job that I hadn't actually applied for. I didn't know a soul in [city], things like that, all sort of fell into place. So lots of it has been a conviction that I'm supposed to be here so the tricky year at [college], because I'd got in and I didn't know why I'd got in on this particular place and course. Rough stuff happened at the beginning, I got thrown out of the accommodation I was supposed to be in and it was all really puzzling but I was sure that I was supposed to be there and it was that conviction that that's alright, you just hang in there and wait and see. So there's been lots of that, which was very valuable actually.

S: This was the primary course?

M: It was, yes. They started off with infants, which of course they would, but I didn't realise that and we were straight into an infant classroom and I just loved it. So I'm really an infant person now. The [subject] bit, twenty years on is just coming in at last, I've waited for this.

[Margaret referred directly to the local authority initiative that the school was involved in. Her remarks are omitted from the published transcript to preserve confidentiality]

S: You'd said you'd found different things out about yourself, you had an opinion and more than that, people were valuing you, encouraging you ...with this sense of trust that we've discussed...you went on to a primary school.

You said you'd found out different things about yourself....What were you actually finding out at that time? Capabilities? Things that you didn't think you could do?

M: Yes. I think there's something about being able to make friends when people don't know anything about you at all. Made really good friends with the [modern language] assistant and we stay in touch now. I stayed with her a while ago... Just holding your own really with complete strangers and I think it's that recognition that people accepting you for who you are which is just quite liberating really isn't it? It was amazing, that year. I'm not sure I was that good an assistant really. You try hard and then you look back and just cringe, don't you, about the sort of things you did?

S: So you arrived at [city] and you're teaching at a primary school?

M: First school

S: By this time it's?

M: 1985...it's my twentieth year

S: What's happened since then?

M: I spent five years there. Then ...quite forceful headteacher in the first school who pushed me to apply for small deputy headships but actually I only applied for two I think and got the second one I applied for - got interviews for

both of them - which was in a small village primary school. I was there for nine years as deputy and I loved it.

S: Were there any particular moments of success that stand out from that period of time?

M: Things seemed to work quite well... I think she was a very good headteacher and very keen to develop the people that she had appointed... so committed to professional development quite early on. She made me do things when I was ready for them. Just like managing a school trip at one point and I can remember the community policeman, he came with us actually saying to somebody, 'Why's that little girl in charge?' (laughter) She nudged me towards things and then when she saw the deputy headships, she said, 'Have a go at that one', and then, 'Go and visit. Go home and get changed first and then go and visit'. I had all these mock interviews which were far scarier than anything I've ever done since. Which was good because I don't think I would have believed that I was up to deputy headship and I did quite like what I was doing there. Tough children but great staff because of the tough children in this first school and then very different children in the village school and I struggled a little bit with this. 'How am I doing worthwhile stuff with these very middle class children who've got everything?' Obviously they're entitled to the very best you can give them anyway. I got used to that one but it was a bit of a shock actually. Again, all very useful experiences, you got the breadth of it all.

S: Looking back on it all now, were there any real shocks to the system?

M: In any of that? There were lots of funny moments especially in the first one because you just have to, to survive, because there were some really tough families there. Just some wild things... It's about staff dynamics I think and staff keeping each other going because there were sort of in-jokes and the caretaker, he'd got a wild sense of humour. You remember those bits rather than, 'Gosh that was difficult because that child kept kicking me'. So staff morale I think was great ... and a lot of those people I'm still in touch with as well.

S: Have you looked back and thought perhaps it's hard to make sense of that at the time...looking back, that changed me... I don't look at things the same way again?

M: I think you just store it for later though don't you? Then use bits of it. The headteacher there died a few years back and just sometimes when I see myself doing things here, I think. 'Oh, she'd approve of this.'

S: What sort of things would she approve of?

M: Well, there's certain things like the children aren't ready to learn just because they're coming through the door at nine o'clock...the busy start to the day so that they're into school activities and they've left home behind because you've given them something interesting that they want to do and then you can feed in what it is that you want them to do next. I can't be doing with this lining up or sitting on the carpet thing first thing because these children might have all sorts of baggage with them. So things like that and just creating lovely things for children because they didn't have an awful lot of lovely things. She really rooted for every family there. She'd be quite tough on parents but she'd fight for them if anybody else was ... So things like that kind of build a bit of muscle ...when you see all that going on around you. And also, erm, this sort of nudging you on the personal development front and I don't know where the money came from but being able to access quite... There was one particular year where a whole load of courses came

out and I did quite a few things and got on quite a few things. I never understood how the funding would work, but she always managed to talk somebody else into paying for it in the end. That was a kind of way to getting starting on the MEd just by doing a bigger course and that idea of the taught courses where you can go for bits, you could go to something on a Wednesday night and then on Thursday in school you could try it out in real life and reflect on whether that was working. I can't really remember what it was like before I did that kind of thing because I think that shaped the way that I work. I really enjoyed that. Some of it was quite hard writing up. I seemed to have spent many, many holidays writing things up, thinking it would be quite nice not to have to do this. That was around the time when people were talking about epistemic writing wasn't it... this whole kind of getting children to write? I'm thinking what I am writing, that was quite liberating wasn't it? Not necessarily accurate in terms of lots of other things to do with writing but those particular children at that first school, to get them to believe they were writers, that was important. You meet people too. I've got quite a rich network of people all over [county] now that I've met on these sorts of courses, that I've bumped into on other courses, especially the bigger courses... NPQH, HEADLAMP, that sort of thing. You could ring up and just check things out. You sharpen each other professionally if you can get into that level of conversation, which is good.

S: You talked about some changes to your views of teaching, being moulded particularly in the first instance by a headteacher colleague in the first school. Was there anything that was beginning to change your own professional values, your professional outlook and beliefs at that time?

M: It didn't change it, it kind of reinforced it. I think people at college, the staff at college when they were writing references described me as very child centred and I didn't realise there was any other way of doing it. And in this first school, you had to be very child centred so there was a lot of trying to find positive ways forward and I don't think it was the sort of culture where children got blamed, which was a bit of a surprise when you've run up against cultures that are different. It was endlessly positive and lots of 'Well, let's have another go' which validated what you'd thought as a student, I think. I had a bad experience on my final teaching practice just thinking about it now. With a teaching style that I just could not get on with.

S: Whereabouts was that?

M: That was in [town]. I think there was a teacher there who, I think she was probably quite close to retirement, had very set ways of doing things and had poor activities that rotated every day and those children knew exactly what was going to happen every day and they were very able children and they needed more surprises than that. I couldn't kind of bust into it on a final teaching practice and they nearly failed me because they wanted to measure me. Because we were the first year of the PGCEs, up until final practice we'd been monitored by the PGCE people but then they shared us around with other people and I got somebody who didn't know what folk had been trying to do with us and it was huge. I'd just got my first job, came back the next week and it was well, let's get you out of that classroom - you don't know what you're doing. It was very scary because I didn't fit a mould for some reason.

S: Or you didn't fit that context?

M: Well, that's right. We'd been given a lot of freedom and again, I suppose we were quite naive in lots of ways on the PGCE course and lots of it was around its Ed Studies, kind of, 'What do you think? How does that work?' It was great being pushed to think so hard but with practical contexts. Some of

that stuff now, I'd quite like to go back to those conversations and how do you promote children's independence and what's that teacher doing now and commenting on what you see and that just didn't fit with what...that was almost an ideal and what we were seeing was real life in this school in [town] which was just unfortunate. I don't think that lady should have actually had students with her but I think in some ways I've learnt huge amount from that practice in terms of what I never wanted to do in the classroom. But made the mistake of saying so in an interview (laughs).

S: In a sense, she acted as a kind of negative model?

M: Yes.

S: We talked about the experience in [country], where you had to change as a person as well as professionally. Did these experiences in first school and then moving into deputy headship of this small village school...was that changing you as a person as well?

M: Yes, the first headteacher at one point she suggested I went on some sort of assertiveness training. I was just thinking about that the other day and I'd love to know whether she'd think I'd got there yet because I have to be assertive somewherebut the deputy headship thing, again it's a bit with negative models there's certain things that led me to think, actually I'm in a position to do something about this. There was a for instance ...

[At this point, Margaret provided a detailed account of how she had dealt with a classroom helper who was having a negative effect on younger pupils' learning. This is omitted from the transcription to preserve anonymity and confidentiality].

...but I could just see that one going on and I was going to take that class next because that was where I really wanted to be and the head was more than happy for me to blitz the place and start all over again but it was how we moved that other person on. It wasn't good, what was in there. So, that was a bit of an edge where you could see what was best for children and see that wasn't what was going on in that room ... So, I think that's probably the first incident of something that I've tried to address that wasn't right; it's all good practice for later on.

S: So you somehow found within you what you thought wasn't there in a sense. A sense of – you used the word assertiveness earlier on - your sense of, 'No, I have an opinion, it's a valid opinion and it's going to be done in this kind of way'.

M: Yes. I just felt so strongly about that and this particular lady had obviously got this reward system which involved stickers and ever since that day I've just been blatantly anti-stickers and everybody knows it and I get laughed at for it, but passionately anti-sticker because of that. Not many things I'm passionate about like that but I think that system damaged children.

S: So you've now been a successful deputy for a long period of time, some nine years or so. What is influencing you now to think well, I want to go onto the next step?

M: I didn't want to go onto the next step, didn't want to go on to the next step. NPQH came in and I thought this might be something useful to have a go at professionally. So again applied for that because it was quite a palaver applying for it in the first stages. I got onto that and did it. I found it quite interesting but a bit too precious about itself and took forever and an awful lot of Saturdays.

- S: You were one of the first?
- M: Yes, cohort one. It was like you had been camping with some of those people because we had been through such a lot together. Bits of it, yes it's valuable stuff. I minded the time it took. I minded its inflexibility and its lack of self evaluation as it went through. I tried very hard to evaluate things and give feedback and again things I didn't realise I was stroppy about but there's some bits there ... you know, you're talking to people that should have been promoting high standards of teaching and learning and actually the teaching methods weren't good enough but there were people going off on band wagons. This was Saturday and we needed to get on with it. What was I learning out of this? It was obviously costing somebody somewhere a fortune.
- S: Yes, I know something of the old model...it's been revised two or three times since.
- M: It's a shame that it's all gone so online with everything now because I did really enjoy being... I quite like being in on the role-play stuff provided it was safe but with secondary colleagues as well as primary people, because I learnt loads from them, you know, when you were modelling interviews. It was great and it was quite rich and there are people out there now that I do feel quite close to because we've done a lot together. So I did NPQH.
- S: With a view to becoming a head or just to see what it was like?
- M: No, I didn't want to be a head. I just thought it would just be a useful piece of professional development, which it was. Then my headteacher got borrowed to go and look after a school that didn't have a headteacher. Someone approached us: there was a school that was likely to be needing a headteacher at short notice. I think the actual request was for either of us to do it which was quite flattering but there was no way I was in a position to do that then. It wasn't a good time for me anyway to leave where I was, so the head of the school that I was in, he went off for two terms again on condition though that I was happy to act up. I was more than happy to act up where I was because I just felt it was a question of ticking over and looking after what was already there. That coincided, that was a January to start, and that coincided with the finance module of NPQH which had been delayed for some other reason. And it all kind of fitted together and actually I enjoyed it more than I thought I was going to. I kind of thought useful experience, interesting, get back to the classroom in September and then.... It was very, very interesting and actually, you know that thing when there's that little professional challenge there and it kind of niggles away and you've got an idea about what you might do and that 'Wow' feeling...?
- S: The coincidence of the acting headship and doing the finance module was beginning to change your mind. Did you think, 'I can do this'?
- M: Not overtly, but I think you always read the job sheets anyway, partly to see who's moving and what's going on out there and also to get a feel... if there is something. Ever since I've been in [county], I've always been very conscious of the fact that it's a real perk being here. It's lovely but this is where lots of people retire to and we started off with our first jobs down here and we need to hold it lightly so that if God wants us to move, we can do without it being too painful to let go of.
- So, my husband and I are constantly reviewing, is this the time to move? We've still got a family up north, everybody's up north except us and it's at that point where you think, 'Should we be closer?' and, 'Are we being called back?' So we do review that quite often. [Husband's] mum had died just

before [name's previous head] was asked to be acting head and we were looking at, was it now? And signals were getting back saying, 'No, we're all fine, we're all coping', but let's keep things as they are, let's not rock any boats. So it wasn't a good moment then for me to go and do an acting headship anywhere else: I need familiarity. But, within that just to think it's nice that somebody's asked. You see other headships being advertised, you know there're always acting headships here, there and everywhere. Just to get a feel of 'oh, perhaps, I wonder, I wonder if.' Then [previous head] was looking after [school] for two terms and he popped in every so often and then one day he came in and said, 'Yes, they've been interviewing today and they've appointed somebody from the middle of nowhere, [name of school]'. I said 'That's not in the middle of nowhere. I know where that is'. They'd appointed her so from then on I knew that this was going because you don't get long to think about it do you? I also knew that this wasn't far away. Oh I know, during the acting headship bit, [name] my husband, we were thinking about, that now would be a good time to move if I had to, so let's have a look at things and also let's think where, if headship is the next step, that I should be taking. We decided that it needed to be within forty-five minutes driving time because of late night governors' meetings and all that sort of thing. So, a couple of them, we did actually drive to them on a Sunday afternoon just to see whether it was worth doing. So there was one in [place] I think that took me fifty minutes to get there. That would take me too long. It was impractical and not going to touch it. Drove this one and it was like thirty-five minutes here and thirty back. Not to put too much on that but that was more than do-able. So I sent off for the stuff and it sounded like where I was and there were other jobs being advertised at the time and they wanted a headteacher to lead ICT, all those things that weren't me. Whereas what was left to do here was things that I knew how to do. There were all sorts of bits and pieces there so I thought I would give it a try, sent off for the details of another school, [name of school] actually and the message there you got was they wanted a strong personality, and again, it didn't feel like me but this one did. So this was the only one I ever applied for. It was really interesting as the day before the interview here my husband bumped into somebody that he used to teach with and it turned out they were living in the village and [name] said that the headship was going and he said, 'Oh, yes, [Margaret] is going to the interview tomorrow', and these people had got children here. Now that chap, his mum was my first headteacher so her grandchildren are here. If that's not a sign that it's the right place to be... it's more than me just setting things up.

S: When I was here before, you said you're a small school person.

M: Yes

S: What did you mean by that?

M: Yes, I think...I loved being a small school deputy. I was really happy in this small school just because of the scale of it all and the way that you got to know children and their families really quickly and the way that you don't need surnames in a small school because everybody knows who you're talking about. So, it's this thing about knowing and being known really quickly and easily and then you can get on and teach because you don't have to do lots of settling in because everybody knows everybody. And, because you know lots about the children then you can use that in the way you teach them and the tuning in and the things that'll make children happy, adapting your teaching to fit that. Just understanding people better, I just love that and the way you can make things happen really quickly too in small schools. Not that it wouldn't be planned but if you've got a really good idea you could make that a school initiative the next day, if you wanted to. Things like that and just the community feel of little schools is lovely. I did see the headteacher that I worked with in the village school was great and loved his job so in terms of

role models, he's one of them. I know somebody else ... we piloted literacy hour in small schools. We played with it for a year before it came in properly just to see how it was manageable in a small school setting. We worked with another small school and again inspirational headteacher there, massive teaching time commitment, clearly brilliant and I think I thought then, 'It's not about reducing your teaching time, it's about what you do with that time.' You use your teaching bits to shape the school because you understand the school from the classroom and you understand the classroom from where ever else you are in the school, it's just really good.

S: You were saying that the teaching commitment is an important part of your headship?

M: I think so, and both of those headteachers were quite passionate kind of about their teaching and when I did actually get this job, in terms of ...I contacted them both quite a bit for advice and both of them were very hot on you sort your classroom first, you lead from the classroom, you do that really well. Not that you have to be best at everything but you set your standards there but you make sure that's your priority, get that right and then you've got time to do the other stuff.

S: Yes, next time we meet we'll talk a little bit more about developments in headship, perhaps the teaching role of the head or the traditional teaching role of the head and some of the newer developments. These are big questions – we may return to them.

You said that this school, this job had your name written on it?

M: It's a terribly arrogant way of putting it but it's just a feeling.

S: This is for me...?

M: Well, I wondered really. When I got the interview knowing that it was going to be two days worth of it, I actually quite like interviews because I don't think it's a one way thing at all. It's about you seeing whether the people that you would be working with would fit your way of doing things. I went into the interview thinking I want to find out as much as I can about this governing body because if I can work with them then I'm interested but if I can't then it's not right. Because I recognised, because I'd learnt from the other school that that's your support isn't really? I really liked them at the interview, I liked them a lot and I remember when people rang me up in between those two days, I remember saying to them, 'I think I could really work with them if they want to work with me'. So, all sorts of different pieces fitted together.

S: Things have gone well?

M: What since then?

S: Yes.

M: I think so.

S: Any particular high points?

M: You notice the tricky points better, actually. It was quite a tricky school to take over. Do you want to know about those bits?

S: Yes, as you wish.

- M: I think the good bits come out of dealing with the tricky bits well, don't they? Very delicate situation in the first couple of years in terms of the staff, also having a very tricky class who had gone through lots of change and very low self-esteem and it was a long time since I'd worked with children who'd got low self-esteem because I'd come from a much better school. This one ought to be as good as my previous school and that kind of surprised me, but again I learnt lots of things on the way and this self-esteem thing and those big children who thought people might just walk out on them or give up on them if their behaviour was bad. I learnt lots about behaviour management, how to promote self-esteem right through your school which is common sense, but to do it almost aggressively just to show these children that you're just not going to give up on them that actually, that was fantastic and we're really going to shout loud about it. So, things like that and when you've got members of staff who you think would be tempted to give up and they're saying well you're still here, that's a sort of move forward, I think. High points have been choosing staff. I think the first time you get to appoint somebody of your own which is actually quite early on, you can start to feel things shifting and then you start mentally doing jig saw puzzles in your head with this 'right if I move that bit there, then there's a space there and I'm looking for something that fits that shape and that would be really exciting' but I can't possibly talk about this because that's my strategy. There's a lot of that and you start to have these great ideas in your head rather than responding to what you've got. It's a, right where can we take this? Perhaps that's the being strategic; but it was useful that first year because I really felt I understood what was coming through the school, teaching the biggest children you could see the product of several years of unsettledness if you like and just thinking about how to make it feel more settled quickly for everybody else, whilst making it look like you knew what you were doing, that was the hard bit.
- S: Success is coming through appointing staff: you're beginning to develop children's self-esteem, their feelings about themselves. Again, a feeling in yourself, perhaps almost a personal feeling, that you're not going to give up on these children.
- M: I might have mentioned this to you last time we spoke but I can just remember coming in and writing on the board on Wednesdays (laughs). Have I told you this? I can remember writing Wednesday on the board and thinking, 'I've survived another week.' It was that basic, it was, what am I aiming to do? I'm aiming to survive, actually. I'll see out this year and I'm going to get there, because all the time I was really sure I was supposed to be here but I didn't expect the classroom bit to be as difficult as it was because that was the bit I thought I was supposed to know how to do. Whereas the other bit was the new bit.
- S: Was this taking a personal toll?
- M: Yes. It was very hard work, but I'd expected it to be hard work... because I was sure it was what I supposed to do next. And of course things had all fallen into place in the right order and I had to fight for this job, I think the competition was quite fierce. I really was sure that I was supposed to be here. It's just this, you set yourself really high standards of wanting to do the classroom well and some of that... there's a little bit of compromise as a teaching head you can't do it as well as you think you remember doing it in the past. Perhaps it wasn't as good in the past as you remember it but you're always wanted to do things well and you can't possibly do everything really well. So I worked very long hours but actually being with the children there's a sort of realism about all this. I'd get to half past eight at night sometimes and think, 'Right, I've got all these books to mark or I could go to bed, which one of those is going to benefit the school more?' And I'd just go to bed. Marking can wait, if I haven't had enough sleep everybody else is going to

suffer and I might not get through tomorrow. So things like that. I also had great help, I'm a big fan of [county] LEA, always have been. People moan about things but actually help's out there if you ask for it and I found really good help there. It was sort of a small number of key people who just listened to me or gave me advice or nudged me forward. Great Chair of Governors too, who just used to come and listen to me once a week and in theory we were talking management leadership level but actually we'd start with the classroom and it was great to be able to talk positively about... She was a very child centred retired lady - very, very child centred - and would help you explore ideas about some of these really difficult children and this reminds me actually that you want affirmation again, validation of this. I'm not going to get cross. I inherited a thing, a policy, quite strict sanctions which I just abandoned because it wasn't me but I needed to be seen to put something else in place and I had no experience of that but I just knew it wasn't right and to be able to talk through with this Chair of Governors what I was doing and the fact that it even though it might not be looking like I was getting there yet, I was sure it would do one day. I didn't know how long it would take to fix either, that's the scary thing. People are watching you.

S: And you also said a Chair of Governors who listened.

M: She was great, yes.

S: What have you learnt, do you think as a result of headship? Has your view of headship and what it was going to be like changed now?

M: I don't think so. I think there are all sorts of bits and pieces that I've picked up as I've gone along that I've put into place. I told you about the reading lady with the stickers in the previous school. That is just a little picture of what happens if you're not honest with people when you see things that aren't right. I'm still not very good at that, I'm quite probably abrupt and clumsy but I do think it's kinder to say if there's something that's not right rather than to put up with it and let people think it's OK because you might be accepting teaching that's not good enough and the worst bit is those children might be getting damaged by inappropriate systems, like the stickers. So, I had to confront staff quite early on here which was scary but I've got an LEA person saying, 'Get in there and do something about it'. And the Chair of Governors saying, 'That was never tackled properly' and then when I did tackle something, I'd got other staff coming to me and saying, 'We're so glad you're doing something about this', and I hadn't realised they'd noticed. I think I wasn't quite ready for the loneliness of not being able to talk about stuff like that. The Chair of Governors I could do because it was completely confidential and I just needed someone to talk to but not to be able to let people know that actually you are trying to fix things and assume that they know nothing of what's going on, especially when it's about personalities and people love them because they're part of the community and all of that. Bottom line is best deal for children. Then if that's not there or we're compromising or just not doing it then that's my responsibility to do something about it.

S: Has this changed you as a person?

M: I'm a bit ruder to people. I don't know. My mum used to tease me, still does sometimes, 'Oh, you sound like a teacher', and, 'You're not at school now'... that sort of bossy edge. There's something about having to deal with things fast, so I'm not very good at doing things slowly these days or putting up with things being done slowly. Just because you can see the sheer pace at which you need to move in school which probably isn't healthy in real life.

- S: You said that when I first came over, NPQH was alright but it dealt with things sort of one at a time. But in reality it's all happening at once.
- M: It does, yes. There are real NPQH days (laughs). There isn't time to stop and think what should I do?
- S: But you've learnt now to handle all that?
- M: Usually you just ring somebody up because there are people paid to be specialists in that particular field and email personnel because actually what you do is going to matter, so it matters that you do it right.
- S: Would there have been a time when you would have tried to have dealt with that yourself, but now you've been here a little while you know people, you're confident?
- M: I think I'm quite good at asking for help, actually. In the early days, I quite blatantly did the 'I'm the new head, I'm sorry I'm supposed to know about this'. I spun that one out as long as I could and I thought, 'There's no need to apologise actually, those people are just there to help, let's ask them'. Sometimes it's a lot quicker to ring up and ask for another one rather than look for something that you'd be sure you've got in school somewhere but, what does it look like? What colour is it? Can I have another one? You've got to get a move on because there's too much to do, so you can't hang about.
- S: Have you surprised yourself?
- M: Yes, I'm very conscious that it's a big scary responsible job and if you thought about it too much then you'd just panic. You think all these little lives that you're responsible for, quite apart from the grown up's, it could be terrifying.
- S: You mentioned when I came over earlier that one of the interesting things that had happened to you, was that you were able to work with small schools overseas in [country]. Has that changed your view of headship and the sort of the qualities that are required to be a head?
- M: I think that's another of those affirming things that just shows you that, hang on in there and carry on doing the stuff right or yes that does work. You see your own school better when you visit somebody else's I think because you see it more clearly when you're at a distance. It's been a real treat meeting colleagues from other countries as well as elsewhere in this country. I'm a bit woolly on actually what I have learnt in that way to be honest. It sounds doesn't itthat I've learnt of things from negative models so perhaps recently so many of mine have been positive models that it's just been a, oh we do it like that. There was a lovely moment when we went to visit a colleague's school in the north of [county] and it was just a moment where I'd gone with another person and we'd taken biscuits for the staff and their staff came straight in, opened the biscuits and just assumed their headteacher had brought them for them. She was out on playground duty and they were all really embarrassed when they realised that we'd bought them, it was just 'that's fine, that's what goes on in our schools too' which isn't necessarily everybody or watching the fact in one of the schools that I went to just watching what a hassle it was getting people to wash the coffee cups up, whereas here everyone chips in because you think if someone's got a minute they do them...
- S: including you...
- M: Yes, it's there to do and they've only been left because those people are all with children. And I don't want people washing up when they should be with

children but somebody will do them and it's not the same person each time. Little things there... On the first round of that working with colleagues in small primary schools, we were struck by the similarities more than the differences and it was a lot about relationships within the staff and how comfortable people clearly felt and how conversations didn't change whether the headteacher is inside or outside the staffroom. It wasn't just because they'd got visitors it was a general feeling of the way they'd talk to you and about you, so you'd really hope that's what happens in your own school but then to step back and think, 'Well, how do you start that? How do you achieve that?' It's been a bit more of a challenge this year because this school has grown a lot and we've got new part-time people and we've got more special needs children who need particular help so we've had extra people join us. We've almost doubled in terms of staff size and just managing those people and making sure they're all feeling the same way about their school, as the small team did. I didn't get that right at all at the beginning, we've put a few things right this term with it. That's been harder work, so it didn't just happen whereas things that would in the past have just happened or you could just have joined as you wanted what was already there hasn't worked quite as well because of the size.

S: If I could just end by saying, I suppose it's my particular time of life but if you had to look back, time has come for you to leave this school ...what would your legacy be? What would have been your fundamental aim for the children in this school?

M: I want it to be a really good school. It's had a reputation for years out there of being a happy school and I think we can do happy and really good as well. I might have mentioned Miss [name].

[Margaret provided personal details of the former headteacher, including national recognition of her work. These are omitted from the published transcript to preserve anonymity and confidentiality].

It's really interesting reading the log books, it kind of says standards OK, happy school, get Miss [name], standards lifted suddenly and that was a good solid patch. So the Miss [name] era this school did really well and really well thought of and I guess it's probably lived on that reputation for quite a while. It's that academic edge that you've got your gifted and talented children and they're much easier to spot in different schools and you can do a lot more with them because you know all their sorts of quirks and interesting things. So that's kind of what I want to really push next, and I think that was the big difference between this school and the previous school, able children, pushing expectations really, really getting children to fly, and I'd really like that to be in place as well as all the really good PSHE stuff that goes on here because I think you can do both together. I think we've made our mark, people know about us. We've got involved in various initiatives so people know our name. So I think I did that. We're not just a village school, we're a good village school. I'm quite ambitious for these children. The school up the road has a much better reputation academically and our children are still surprised on the occasions when we beat them at sport and I quite like that moment of surprise, there's a sort of humility there, wow, really? If we could carry on winning with that, wow, we really weren't sure which way it was going to go. I think that's really nice, a nice feeling to it. I don't want to be in their shadow and I'm not sure we are anymore actually but we have been in the past.

S: You said as well as the academic side, the important PSHE side...

M: Yes, it linked a bit with some of the stuff that we did in the first year, in terms of creating children's self-esteem and spending a lot of time listening. I don't

know whether it's the school itself, I think people that have worked here over the years, there have been lots of people who've been very caring people who've spent lots of time with children, very child centred and historically that might have been at the expense of standards and actually I would argue that child centredness is about standards because they're entitled to it. It's almost, perhaps it's quite hard to maintain academic rigour in small schools where it feels informal so you've got to fight to get the sharp edges if you like. The PSHE, we've got individual teachers who are still with us, who are just fantastic in modelling that and you see that from the way that they take a long to reach the staffroom at play time because they've stopped for a chat with children on their way down from the top site, for instance or there's a child that comes to the staffroom with a problem and it's not just their class teacher that goes and deals with it, it's whoever's nearest. Again it's staff modelling, but it's what the staff priority is I think. So someone would come in having a tough time today and there's always someone who will say, 'Have you noticed that he's done this today or he had a bad experience yesterday, how's he feeling about that?' It's the whole child thing of the putting the pieces together as a team which I really love which is why we can do staff meetings and parents meetings with a group of people because we've got added... Somebody said something about the teachers here really like each other. I can't remember where that came from but I just thought that was really nice that someone had noticed it. We laugh a lot as staff and we laugh with the children a lot. I love going past a classroom door and hearing gales of laughter started by the teacher or you go in and you can't find the teacher. It's not just a lovely time, there's real quality in there too. Always been good at circle time, I've learnt lots about circle time through the people who were already here. There was almost a feeling that bright children didn't need that kind of thing and it's for making the slower children feel loved and wanted and actually it's the other extreme isn't it? It's those children that need to be able to handle everybody else, rather than just being stuck in their own little boxes. Governors were very hot on it too. I can remember being at my interview when you know how they have that thing where they start sending people home at interviews and you reduce the number of candidates left to be interviewed. I can remember somebody, this was the bit at the education office when they came out, perhaps when they got to me, was it? And there was a feeling that the LEA officer came in and obviously said that they wanted me and there was a real feeling that that was dealt with too fast, so as I was going in to talk to everyone else, Chair of Governors waited to come back out to catch people who'd been allowed to go because.. you know...that sort of care that people are handled well because that was the priority there, you deal with that person before you deal with the person that you would appoint. There's been a huge amount of that. I think it's built on over the years. Lots of it really but I suppose that must've been led by previous headteachers too so it's kind of in the water. Which must possibly... I don't know whether the church school ethos makes that easier or whether that was the starting point or not. But it's very 'peopley' here, which sometimes makes it quite hard to get on and do things fast, but there's pay back on that.

S: We've come to the end of our time, Margaret and I know just how busy you are, so thanks ever so much for that.

Interview ends.

Appendix 2

Interview 2: 15th November 2006

Terry: Rising Mead Primary School

Stephen: Once again, thank you ever so much for your time. I know just how busy you are. Just to say, Terry, before we begin, it's important that I remind you of confidentiality and so on... as long as you are happy that I am recording this particular interview. As always, you have the right not to answer any questions: we only go where you want to go. Similarly, if you want to stop the tape recorder or the machine at any time, please do so. So you're driving things. Is that alright?

Terry: That's absolutely fine.

S: Thank you for the last conversation; I've made a few notes of key points. From [city] to the grammar school, we talked and you raised the issue of the loss of your father and we talked something of the implications of that; we talked a little bit about your decision to enter teaching, having decided that banking and commerce were not for you and then an important issue which I'd like to take up a little further in our conversation if I could: your teaching career and the evident satisfaction that you felt both in your work in the classroom and the pleasure and enjoyment you got from the confirmation of the quality of that practice which you did talk about from local advisers, other senior professionals and so on. Then we touched on your secondment to a higher education provider, your first headship and the second headship and our conversation ended where you shared something of the difficulties that you inherited in taking up your current headship.

My opening question, having looked through these things Terry was to do with the pattern of events. Do you think there's a sort of thread or link running through these events?

T: (Pause) ... Yes, I was doing a little bit of thinking in terms of, hum, I suppose related to personal growth...

S: Yes, absolutely...

T: that runs through this... and how that personal growth is fostered and cultivated and adjusted in respect to the things which happen to you in the course of your life. It's not just the things that happen to you, it's the people you meet and when I was reflecting on this, I was thinking, well okay, I think I've grown personally not just through the experiences that you have in terms of the impact it has on you as a person, but it's about how you then begin to make relationships with people further on down your life span and how you empathise and develop friendships with a certain type of person. Sometimes those people are people that are similar to you and therefore, you have strong empathy and sometimes it is people who have an influence on you.

Perhaps there is a certain quality about them that you wish you had and respond to, so I suppose one of the privileges of working in this job is that you do come across a wide variety of people and not only in terms of the professional capacity but the sort of fringe capacity; governors, parents, , etcetera, etcetera.

So I was looking at personal growth and felt that a lot of it has been through the people I work with. Headship through other heads: so networking, collaboration, and activities of those sorts are crucial... in school, the changing personnel that you are involved with. Once you are into headship,

it's the different deputy heads that you work with and what they bring and different senior management teams and what they bring because you do work inevitably much closer with them than with other colleagues. The accountability process is alongside that – it helps you redefine your vision, your aims, the ethos that you want in the school. What I am saying is that you are constantly drawing on your past history in terms of refining the direction that you want to go in; so your personal growth is obviously crucial in setting that direction.

S: You've talked very much in terms of your personal and professional growth in terms of experiences and breadth of experience through headships and so on, Terry. There was another aspect to the personal growth – that was the growth in terms of confidence as well, personal confidence as well that came through ... you'd indicated that going into both commerce and banking and feeling unconfident personally about that. There were various moments as well that you talked about in your career, like the first time you'd had to take or lead an assembly. I think you used the words, 'I was quaking'.

T: Yes, that's right.

S: Have these various relationships, meeting different people professionally and personally along the way ... has that contributed to this growth in confidence do you think?

T: I think as you go through those formative years of training, you are exposed to more and more opportunities whereby you are having to front an audience, speak up within groups and things of that sort. And when you see other colleagues performing in that way and the things that they do, you gradually take on board the skills that they have. Once you've done your first class lesson, your first assembly, you just build on those experiences. People say to me now, 'You're so confident in front of an audience. I wish I could be like you.' I said, 'Maybe you will one day'.

It's a chalk and cheese situation now. I don't have any feelings about standing up and talking to a hall full of children now, but I can certainly remember those early days. I empathise as a result with those colleagues who say, 'I'm really worried in front of a large group and I don't like it when other adults are in there as well'.

Because I think that there is actually a definite bridge to cross. There are quite a lot of people in the teaching profession – this is similar to actually actors, isn't it, because to be a good teacher, you're actually a good actor as well, to a point?

They are actually very shy, sometimes, in social company. You don't see them as that person who transforms themselves in front of a group of children and can be quite powerful in that role.

I think I was probably one of those at one point – I was very comfortable with children and had an easy going rapport with children, maybe in adult company, I was less secure.

But I think one has helped the other in the fullness of time.

S: That's interesting. Just on this sense of thread or pattern, you indicated that in your life there hasn't been a particular faith position.

T: Not a strong one.

- S: I wondered, in this broader sense, if you were aware of some guiding principle, purpose, sense of direction to the various landmarks in your personal life and professional life so far?
- T: Yes, I have a faith and I know there must be... I feel that there must be some greater force at work and you do a lot of ... and when you have loss in your life you do look at yourself and question, 'Who am I? What is my role in the fullness of things, don't you?' And I suppose question mortality a lot more I think when you see it at first hand.
- I'm very much a spiritual person in terms of the awe and wonder of the earth that we live on. And I think that has translated itself in my philosophy towards education that this links in if you like with appreciation of the world around and first hand learning. So there is a thread there: come on, let's have a look at this world that we live in, your role in it and what you can do to make it a better place as a person and in terms of looking after the environment we have.
- Those are quite strong threads through my own teaching and through my ethos towards the sort of school that I want to be the head of. Therefore I tend to look, in terms of recruitment, at people who have first and foremost that sort of caring ethos; they're empathetic to children's needs and have that sort of broader view of what education is all about. Learning by first hand experiences is key. Without recognising it immediately, you know that that's what you're looking for.
- S: I've actually flagged up direct first hand learning experiences as one of the issues that came through...
- T: Just to pull that together, I remember when I was preparing for interviews in my progression through the teaching profession, I latched on to a Chinese proverb which I came across. I think I can remember what it was. It was: 'You talk, I listen; you show, I watch; I do and I understand'. I used that proverb on many occasions for interviews as I was going up through teaching, because that's really what I want to see in the classroom.
- I want to see children doing things, not just being passive listeners. That sort of involvement is what I want to see translated now in the classroom.
- S: Yes, while I was waiting, I was looking at some fantastic arts week photographs and ceramics and things. Towards the end of our meeting last time, you talked about Macbeth and very movingly about Macbeth. What were trying to encourage ...develop within the children?
- T: I'm not going to accept sole responsibility for saying, 'Please do have a go at doing Macbeth with children.' But it does come back to the person who is doing it was my first recruitment here. It was a colleague who I was at [previous headship school] with who I took on as a mature NQT on a temporary part-time contract there. Such was her promise in her future career – exactly the sort of person I wanted to bring in here to start influencing what was going on here. That was always going to be my first appointment. It's her who's representing those aspects of that sort of ethos we've been talking about in practice now.
- It's her who runs the drama club and so forth. So, yes, OK we're talking about a common ethos and obviously, I go out of my way to praise her when she's doing those sorts of things, because that's exactly what we want to see. In fact, in our first OfSTED in 98 it coincided with her doing something very similar. I can't remember whether it was Macbeth or not, but it was at the time

of the inspection. I said, 'Come in and watch this' to the inspectors. The message was conveyed about where we're trying to go.

S: I was going to go on from that to say that you talked about these rich experiences for children. But, I'm constantly looking at the person as well as the professional if you see what I mean. If those are the experiences that you want the children to say, 'Wow, I'll never look at the world in the same way again,' are there any particular experiences that have made Terry say, 'Wow, I'll never look at the world in the same way'? Experiences can be episodic as well as just of the moment.

T: I think it's probably more of the episodic as you say because I think I take a lot of personal pleasure just by immersing myself what you might say are the simple things around you, to be honest. I enjoy a country walk, I enjoy holidays by the sea. I enjoy taking children on residential to these sorts of places. A lot of my relaxation time is outdoor experiences. I don't think there's any one thing that leaps out. There are so many episodes of experience that I guess would flash up in my mind in that respect but actually there are few learning experiences...when I did a course on [environmental education] way back – you might remember [names provider] – well, I remember doing one of his [environmental education] courses. He just had way of getting you to look at things in a different way...

S: With the...?

...When it was done with the children, I mean there was a big 'Wow' factor there. There was a 'Wow' factor for me. There's clearly a 'Wow' factor for children if it was repeated in the same way. So, yes, little things like that, really. I can't say that there's any major thing. Whether this is relevant or not, I think there have been inspirational speakers ...

S: Yes...

T: in education which have enabled me to sort of keep on track if you like. Having said that – Gervais Phinn (laughs) - have you ever heard him?

S: Only on radio, not live.

T: I had the privilege of going to a couple of actual inputs...literacy with? Some dynamic word he used. Things like that. Again, he's a person who's using first hand opportunities to get the children thinking and writing. To hear that sort of justification reinforces my own views.

S: The other issue that came through, Terry, was the acknowledgement – that I mentioned earlier - of you as an outstanding primary practitioner by advisers and so on before you began to move into headship.

What was going through my mind as I was listening to that part of our conversation was the notion of your own personal and professional identities bound up in this notion of you being a good primary practitioner. At one point you talked about your earlier headship. Where you felt you were... the phrase was 'no longer the best practitioner in the school'. Somehow the demands of headship were making you feel disempowered in some ways. Other things had taken you away from the classroom. I wondered if you felt the same sense of loss here and now, given that your identity is bound up so much with classroom practice, how you had come to terms with that?

T: There was definitely an adjustment I had to make, to move from this position of being the manager of a class to being the manager of a school. I think it's a big dilemma for the teaching head because the amount of energy, personal

energy and drive and time that has to go into producing an exciting curriculum for the children: well planned, well responded to, well encouraged, and so forth is a hugely demanding task. And when you find yourself in a teaching headship, you find that the school also demands drive, well planned, well responded to energies from you. The two ...it's very difficult to match the two together, so you have to change your personal sort of philosophy and I have to accept, right, I'm not going to be the teacher that I was when I was committing myself fulltime to that; I have to adjust that thinking to I'm in charge of the school. I have to give my energies to that. I've got to hope that I've got a good part-time teacher who's doing the job with me who's going to give that real drive and enthusiasm to the class that I'm working with. I've just got to do the safer, the safer things and in a way you're having to wipe out some of the things which actually gave you the job satisfaction.

S: That's what I'm getting at: how easy is that?

T: It wasn't easy, because without doubt, and it applies now. Most of the job satisfaction comes with the time that you're working with the children. I suppose you get a bit more of the buzz, if you like – the personal reward – comes when you do get the chance to stop and reflect back on what you have achieved over a period of time. On a day-to-day basis in headship you don't get those chances. A lot of it is responding to some form of crisis or some form of accountability process and you do get shunted away, shall we say, from the children. Those opportunities that you can have to interact with the children become highly valuable.

S: Do you get many of those now?

T: I do some teaching; I take year 6, some booster groups to support them. I do a little bit of cover from time to time. I take assemblies regularly. I do get a buzz from incidental visits to classrooms and just spending ten minutes ad hoc sitting down with a few children at random, supporting them with what they're doing. It serves a dual purpose for me, it's a form of informal monitoring, isn't it, to see what's going on in the school, but important just to think, 'This is what it's really all about'. I can see it happening in this class wow, that's great and in the more formal monitoring that I do as well, where I do a lot of talking to children.

I do a lot of formal monitoring with children when I'm talking to them about their learning experiences as well. That's valuable, I love that, it's good to just have that opportunity to conference with the children. Not a lot of formal teaching, not a lot of chance to take responsibility for the teaching but to immerse oneself in it on just little short bursts is rewarding.

S: You raised the issue about the personal loss that took place in your teen years and the impact that that had had on you both as a head and as a person. Do you want to say more about that?

T: I don't know if I said this last time, but I was reflecting on it again this morning; and I think it's given me an empathy for children who don't always have it easy at home. Not necessarily in terms of loss, but don't always have it easy at home. And so, I guess over the years, I've gone that extra mile in terms of tolerance, patience, support both for the pupil and the parent, so the nurturing side is powerful in my personal approach to the job, so I tend again to look for that in recruitment as well. Has this person got that caring, nurturing feel about them? Because that's the sort of person I want working in my school. So it has got that subconscious element within my thinking, so I suppose it's had an impact on the ethos of the school. I've been lucky to recruit teachers who have that care aspect. So care for me is big in terms of recruitment and ethos.

S: The final issue that I identified was coping with the issues that you inherited here in this school. You said, at one stage, 'I did wonder if I have the personal strength to do it' because clearly it was going to be extremely challenging. So my question (laugh) is a fairly straightforward one: what gave you hope that you could actually do it?

T: You've got to be positive. I knew that in many ways you hear this advice, don't you, when you're going into a headship, you're often given the advice, 'Go somewhere where you can make a difference', as opposed to following somebody who has been all singing, all dancing – got a cracking school, because it's difficult to make an impression, isn't it? So, I suppose in both of these headteacher posts, it could definitely only go one way. So those were attractions but they do have ... the downside is you do have to summon your inner strength to keep going, because you do hit a lot of brick walls and you've got to battle your way through them.

S: So what are you defining as 'inner strength'?

T: Vision. This can be better and I know how it can be better. These children are not getting a fair deal; these teachers are not getting a fair deal. It's not always about ... they have had a raw deal over a period of time for all sorts of reasons. It could be the quality of the building that they're working in. It was certainly the case here; it was the pits. That was number one because there's nothing like working in a decent building to raise your morale. So all those sorts of issues are what you're going over in your mind. So you have to retain that vision and there's then about winning people on board. My approach has always been about being a gradual influence rather than a new broom; so it's about winning confidence, building up the strength of the team, hence using key players. There's something I came across recently – it's 'Get people on to your bus and then make sure they're sitting in the right seats'; 'Getting the right people on to your bus and make sure they're sitting in the right seats'.

So I think that is something which is key. But my personal approach is one of openness, so I've gone out of my way to explain, to justify but not accept the status quo necessarily. So when there is a problem, it's been a problem shared and I've given people time. I will talk to people; professional discussion if you like. Whenever I've been asked what will be your priorities when you first take this post up, it is, actually, I'm not going to do very much, really. I'm going to see what makes this place tick. There's things I can do immediately; but there are things that are going to take some time and a part of that is I'm going to have a chat with everybody in the school about how they view the school, what their history is in the school, what they feel are the priorities and so on. It's also the same approach you have with children; it's positive reinforcement. So it was about valuing efforts, no matter how small it was. It was about valuing what that person has done. There are a lot of people in the teaching profession, who maybe have got tired, but they gave a huge lot to that school a few years back. Sometimes you have to help them to rediscover what it was that gave them the buzz then...so support and being patient, but having the strength to act when perhaps a response wasn't being made.

S: I was going to ask about that – we began to touch last time on incidents that had been particularly demanding for you. You recounted one incident that you felt very bruised by, in terms of the vehemence of the response that you encountered from parents. You also talked a little bit about personnel issues. Obviously, we didn't dwell on any details there, but concentrated more on the stress and pressures and emotional strains on you then.

I wondered, you've outlined a sense of your own personal values which are very much to do with encouraging people, bringing people along. Is there any

way do you think that developmental, organic, supportive approach that you instinctively want to have is in conflict with contemporary demands?

T: This actually came up when I was doing a leadership programme for serving headteachers, where the various leadership styles that you need to have in some form of balance were necessary to become an overall effective leader. As I mentioned to you last time, I've always come out as the team builder: 'Let's get everybody together'. One of the key ones was the ability to – I can't remember what phrase they would use for this leadership style now - but it was that ability to be demanding of people, to hold people to their responsibilities; to be quite sharp and focussed in that role at times and I recognised, during in the course of that, that was probably one of my slight weaknesses – I'm not saying a total weakness – a slight weakness. Because again, you have to quite confident when you're putting yourself in that situation because you have to be very clear about what the background is to that person's situation; you also have to be clear about where you're trying to go and be able to justify why you have to act firmly, otherwise, it's going to be a difficult process to go through. But, having said that, whilst I'm engendering the team and being patient, there have been times when I have had to question competence.

S: Even though it's been hard for you personally?

T: Very hard, very hard. I think any personnel issue is always a hard issue, it's fine when everything's going smoothly and it's about fostering and cultivating team spirit, but if there's something in there that's not going well – a difficult person, or someone who's not responding in the same way as everybody else – those are the most difficult things to handle, as well as perhaps pupil issues of a similar nature. I guess key incidents were certainly here when we were going through the outcomes of reorganising the school from junior to primary status, we had this falling role. We had three consecutive years of redundancy which was hard, not hard just in terms of dealing with the people involved, but it has an atmosphere in the school – who's next? Will it be me next? It obviously eats away at school development as well.

S: So how did you feel through this process?

T: It was difficult, it was difficult. It means you have to focus on the positive and almost ignore it when you're in the staff development arena but in your private moments, you're wondering, 'How am I going to manage this?' I was reasonably lucky in terms of when things came through; people put their hands up and said, 'I'll take an early package'. There were one or two pinch moments on it, but generally, I was quite lucky. It could have been a lot more sticky than it was.

S: Did you learn more about yourself as a person through this process?

T: I recognised the need that there is a need to address your leadership style; to make a determined effort to look at the balance of leadership styles that you have. That leadership programme for serving headteachers was quite powerful for me in terms of self analysis, in terms of the way that I am as a person and the way that I am as a leader and to recognise there are certain qualities that I need to be more conscious of.

S: Sustainers, what's sustaining you?

T: Yes, sustainers. Inspirational speakers, I've mentioned about INSET now, interaction with other heads is a key motivator. But a 'beware' here; because if you start mixing with heads who are getting a bit tired and weary, it just becomes a moaning shop and I actually hate that; I hate getting into that. So I

tend to detach myself from that, because there, sadly, is quite a lot of that now. You go to most heads' meetings and there's a lot of angst and concern about coping with things and it can drag you down. I try mix with people who've got a slightly more positive outlook on things. So professional sustainers – network, making sure I get some CPD. New challenges, avoiding unnecessary tasks if possible, but that's becoming increasingly difficult to do.

Personally sports, my interests keep me going, something totally different from school – Saturday afternoon [sport] is crucial. It's also about meeting people who are not all teachers.

Family life has been crucial through that process. But you have touched a slight raw nerve, because it has impacted on my marriage.

S: You only need to say what is comfortable for you

T: It's true. It has, it has impacted on my marriage. Currently I'm separated...

S: Would you prefer that I...? [*I offered to stop recording*]

T: No, it's alright. It's important because I think the pressures of headship, the pressures of the hours that you put in has probably had a negative impact on maintaining a positive relationship with those who are nearest and dearest. I include my children to some extent; that maybe I was putting other people's children ahead of my own at times, going away on residential, all this sort of thing and the energies that you put in, and sometimes the energies that you put in a demanding week at school or a day at school and you come home; you almost don't want to know your own children for a while. It has had some sort of impact. So I think the crucial thing is that that's had an impact on me as a leader, because I'm wary of how my colleagues are coping with things, especially if they've got demands of families. There is another life out there and this is only a job, but it gets quite difficult to maintain that balance and it has had an impact on me personally. Hopefully, I'm going to come out of it OK but without doubt it has had some sort of influence and I think it is important that that is ... and I know other people who've got into headships who say the same thing. It has had a bearing on my personal life; you don't get much of a personal life Monday to Friday and even weekends sometimes, you know. It's not getting any easier which is worrying, despite all the government things about reducing bureaucracy – it's not happening, it's not happening. The accountability process has got much, much greater.

S: Well, thank you for sharing that. As I said at the beginning, we'll only go where you want to go...as long as you're happy with that.

T: No, that's fine.

S: We've looked at sustainers, then. The next area that I'd like to share with you is to do with inspirations and motivations. Do you still enjoy headship?

T: Yes, hum... I suppose the age that I am and the point I am in my career, I've sort of asked myself the question, Well, OK. What now?' I mentioned that one of the sustainers is new challenges. Hum, yes, I've been at this school for twelve years now, but it's been something of a unique school to be in because it has had to go through so many changes: the primary thing; the ...mmm ...new buildings issues; we're now likely to have the children's centre on our site, so there have been new things that reinvigorate the professional energies if you like. But the actual physical and mental demands are heavy. So you start thinking, 'I don't want to be one of these statistics who retires at 60 or 60+ and lives for x years that you hear so much about'. So I am

questioning very much, wrapped up with what I was talking about a few minutes ago, about exactly where I go from here. In answer to your question, do I still enjoy headship? The answer generally, is yes but there are too many elements of bureaucracy, restrictions on - I guess freedom – that make it a difficult job. Hum, I'm pleased that QCA and so on are releasing pressure on the curriculum again so that we are going back to a much more creative way of looking at the curriculum but we still have the accountability that is purely based on data. If you are not getting those percentages at level 4 big questions are asked of you and you have to justify your existence as a result. That is a big pressure for a school – any school which is in a challenging catchment area has that much bigger agenda to look at.

S: Are there still moments of joy for you here?

T: There are. Yes, there are because I'm lucky to have a fantastic staff. When we had the new buildings and there was a lot of discussion about how we have moved over a period of time. People were saying that, you know, that this is down to you and the fight that you put in to get it. So there are times when you do get opportunity to reflect back and think, well, OK, I was responsible for that, but I don't, I'm not taking personal glory here, because... but you are orchestrating it. I've been lucky to work with very supportive governors in both schools while I've been here and that's key. I've been lucky to work with some excellent, committed professional teachers and teaching assistants and supportive parents and those are the key rewards in a headship. If any one of those starts going wrong, the pressures build up. So that's why I've referred to personnel issues. If you have a big personnel issue it almost makes the job too difficult to cope with for a period of time.

If you have an exclusion to deal with – that can be very difficult to deal with. If you have parental complaints, they knock your equilibrium, because the job is already demanding and if you get those sorts of things coming in, it can just tip the balance a bit.

S: Do you deal with those in a way that is at least not as stressful as it may have been in the early part of your career?

T: Probably I do, I probably take the view, 'Well, if they think that after all this time there's not much I can do about it'. I know I work hard, I know I've done a lot for this school... if people think they want to complain, well....

S: Have you got an example?

T: No, not really, I've been very lucky. You get the incidental parental moans and you think, 'Where are they coming from, for goodness sake?' Don't they appreciate the actual things that we are doing for their children as opposed to the little things that go wrong? Sometimes it's hard to turn around to a positive thing, but in the main, we've been very lucky, we've got very supportive parents.

S: If we could look at you now. How do you look after yourself as a person?

T: Without doubt having a stable personal life – I mean having stable relationships in your life – that is crucial. That's what's come into my thinking over the last year or so, how important that is, to have that domestic retreat, someone you can share the ups and downs of your day with, have an easy going interaction with – that is crucial, a crucial part in any one's life, but I think when you are involved in a quite emotionally demanding sort of job as this is, it becomes even more important. Keeping yourself physically fit is important too. If you're not physically fit, without doubt, your brain's not fit either. So I do try to escape and keep myself fit in that respect. I take a

moderate level of interest in reading up around education, but I don't immerse myself in it as I would have done say ten years ago. That's probably because you need a bit more recovery time now when you get to the age that I have.

S: Do you have any time at all for reflection?

T: Not enough, not enough. I think most headteachers would say that's their biggest problem. In fact we were discussing this with our governing body. They were trying to encourage me to not be afraid to stay home and work and to think about things. The problem that I have, if I come into school, is I just don't get more than twenty minute blocks. When you've got the bigger issues of putting your vision into practice through the school improvement plan or something like that you do need time for reflection. Sadly, that's probably one of the hardest things to achieve.

I often listen to colleagues who've had experience abroad and that - I'm trying to think specifically now - but I know I've engaged in conversations - where you wouldn't be put under this sort of pressure in some of the education system in some of the other countries. It's Australia, isn't it where they have a term's sort of secondment just to refresh every six years or something? And I think, and it's beginning to happen. I've been to one or two conferences on this, so it's beginning to happen. There's a recognition that heads do need to be able to recharge the batteries and to have extended time to reflect on their professional status and so forth and I think there needs to be some built in system whereby you can actually get away from the workplace for a period of time.

S: In the odd moments that you do have, what sort of things are you reflecting about?

T: Probably how to prioritise things really, you do spend quite a bit of time thinking about your colleagues, especially if you see that maybe they're struggling and thinking how you can best support them - things of that sort. I tend to reflect on where do we need to go. How can we move from being good to outstanding? I'm ambitious for the school; ambitious not for myself, but for the school and everybody who works in it. I'd like someone to come in one day and say, 'What a cracking school; this is an outstanding school'. Everybody can celebrate that sort of success. So I do spend a little bit of time on what can we tweak here; what can we tweak there that's going to move us from there to there? And, of course, you're always mulling over the events of the day and so forth. I wouldn't say there was any one specific thing. I would think it's a whole range of things and how they crop up and how you're trying to move forward.

S: Do you have any time just for silence?

T: Yes, I do and I enjoy that.

S: And how do you make time for that?

T: I guess most evenings, I tend to. The first thing I'll probably do is just go home, change, have a shower, sit down, put on some music for about twenty minutes.

S: What sorts of things are going through your mind then?

T: (Laughter) hah, ha, ha... All sorts! No one thing in particular. I try to empty my head of school, really, to be honest but inevitably it crops up.

- S: Which led actually to the next question which I was going to suggest we talked about. What are you when you're not a headteacher? Do you ever stop being a head?
- T: I don't think you can. It can come back to you at the weirdest moments, little things, but...I can, yes I can. You do find your peers who will say, 'I can tell you're a teacher'. But mixing with people of my own age, I'm quite fortunate, that there's people I've been playing [sport] with for the last twenty or thirty years. We play together in the same team every Saturday; we can share a pint and a discussion on all sorts of matters, very rarely thank goodness on education. I'm probably a highly competitive person on the [sport] pitch still, but that is my escape. I can stop being a headteacher for a time. That's important.
- S: You mentioned right at the beginning of this conversation, Terry, you found a great deal of personal inspiration and nourishment through walking, through the countryside and being engaged with the environment. Have you ever had those moments when you've been on a walk or whatever and you've seen something or picked something up... 'Wow! I've got to rush in and share that with the children'. ...those moments of inspiration in your personal life and you've thought, 'I can't wait to get back in on Monday and share that with them in assembly or in the classroom'.
- T: Gosh, yes! Many, many, let me think. There have been times when I've referred to things I've done at the weekend in assemblies. I have done things in assemblies; I guess when the seasons are coming round and part of the cycle of assemblies is to refer to the changing seasons and so forth. So, yes, I'll bring in artefacts I've gathered and draw children's attention to the awe and wonder of the world out there, hum, yes, I've done that. I've brought things back from the seashore and explored that. Maybe not necessarily in assembly, but maybe as a talking point in the classroom; constant inspiration from the world around us.
- S: Do you feel satisfied professionally?
- T: Yes, yes, but not to the point that I don't think that I've not got anywhere to go, that I'm resting on my laurels. I'm still ambitious; I want to move the school from this box to that box as I was describing earlier. I think we're a good school, but I'd like to move it to aspects of outstanding in some areas. I believe we have the capacity to do it. You have still to devote a great deal of energy sustaining a certain level, let alone moving to another level. So I think I can look back on my career with degrees of satisfaction; where I am now, I am satisfied, but not totally satisfied. I want to move things further; things that I know I want to achieve before I finish here. I'd like to see a nursery here, for instance. I'd like have that influence on the community recognised, that the children in this locality would benefit from having an extended foundation stage for all the reasons we talked about before – the lack of opportunity that a lot of these children have had in the formative years. I feel that a nursery would be a positive legacy for me to leave here. I guess I do not want under any circumstances to be one of these people who goes out under any sort of cloud. You know, I go under and I go out under stress, those sorts of things. I couldn't bear for that to happen after all the years of effort and drive – that would be a great disappointment to me if that were to happen. Sadly, I think that happens to so many colleagues. I'm very conscious of that so I think to go into retirement with some sort of element of satisfaction; that you've gone out on some sort of high is going to mean a lot more in terms of how you enjoy your retirement.
- S: Is that something that is in your mind?

- T: The 'what now?' thing; I'm beginning to look at life outside the school in a different way now. That's not to say, I not using my energies here.
- S: Do you feel satisfied personally?
- T: No, I don't. I'm frustrated by looking back on my personal life to think that I may not have devoted the energies to my key relationships that I should have done. There is an element of frustration and an element of regret there, but I would hope that by reflecting carefully at this stage, I could either remedy or learn from that situation for what I hope will be a long and happy and healthy retirement. And enjoy my last few years as headteacher here and enjoy it in a positive way. That is my main ambition really.
- S: Is there anything else you would like to leave as a legacy?
- T: How you are regarded really by headteachers...that anyone remaining here on the staff will say, 'Yes, it as great working with Terry; I prospered as an individual with Terry. The children are going to say, 'Oh, yes, Mr [name] was fun. Parents are going to say, 'Yes Mr [name] did a lot for that school.'
- If I can feel that those sorts of comments are genuine and well meant; if I can feel I've had those sorts of influence on the professional growth of colleagues; if I've given children chances and an outlook that they would not otherwise have had as a result of being in this school. These are all things which would give me a sense of personal satisfaction.

Interview ends.

Appendix 3

Interview 3: 21st November 2006

Bernadette: St Mary's Church of England Infant and Nursery School

Aide-memoire (Appendix 4) is passed to Bernadette

- Stephen: If I pass that over to you...it's headed up confidential and it's a draft obviously for all kinds of reasons. What I've done is been through the conversations which we've very kindly had on the past couple of occasions and begun to draw out key themes as I saw them. What I'd like to do first of all in our meeting is explore those key themes with you, if I could, and then perhaps gauge both our views on how they are shaping up. As usual everything is confidential, anonymised: you don't need to answer a question at all that you aren't comfortable with. If you want me to stop the recording at any time, you only need to say so. You're in the driving seat.
- Bernadette: Thank you, yes, yes.
- S: What I've done is arranged a number of headings. I...erm...was struck looking at the transcripts and hearing the recordings at the way we seemed to be talking...returning to religious faith. So we talked a little bit about Christ as an example for living and I think your own view which you articulated, that Christ was providing a model if you like, a perfect model, of the way in which human life should be conducted but not divine. In theological language I suppose with the way I expanded this was that Jesus was a man that lived a close intensive awareness of the presence of God and allowed his life to be directed by the Spirit. From that, the driving force from faith defined in that sense for you was to simply be the best human being that one can possibly be ...
- B: Yes...
- S: and then, taking that further, professionally then the obligations seemed to be to enable each member of the school's community to be the best person that they can be. Have I got that right as an informing force because that unpacked into aspirations, community and all the other things that we talked about?
- B: Yes.
- S: We talked about a whole range of events from your upbringing in [place] and wading knee deep in mud through bogs, [city district] and all sorts of things along the way. I just wondered have there been any ...strands or links or commonality in terms of a thread running through these various things that have happened along the way. Would you say there was a sort of sense of direction or purpose or meaning to all these various things that have happened?
- B: I don't know. That's quite a difficult question (long pause) I'm not sure what you mean by the threads, Stephen.
- S: I'm trying to say, we talked about a whole number of things. We've talked about [place], we've talked about [place], we talked about your call for teaching, we talked about how there was a loss along the way; we talked about your coming here and the tremendous work that you've done in building up the school. I just wondered if somehow you'd looked back and thought, hum, there's seems to be a kind of linking pattern, there's something that's going on here, there's something that's giving me a kind of direction to

my life. Are you aware of that? I just wondered if you had pulled them together in any coherent way.

B: Not in that sense. I feel that there's never been... I've never seen an advanced plan in my life or in how my life has developed. I can see a connection between my earlier life and my life now

S: Oh, right...

B: in that although I grew up a lot of the time in cities, there's always been that connection with the countryside and nature which has come through for me. I suppose that might be a thread that runs through because even when we were in [city] and in [city] as children I had parents who could not understand to keep off the grass...

S: (laughter) Yes...

B: so we didn't go to the [name] parks as much as the commons where you can climb the trees. So that is a thread that's run through and something I that look for, for the children that I work with now because I found that... I suppose that was my kind of meditation as a child, that ability to find a peaceful natural place to be and I still do that. So there's been that kind of thing, but I don't know...it's almost...it feels almost accidental but it is kind of circular in that sense. What isn't accidental is that I have purposely given my own children that experience, although their lives have been different from mine. That is intentional and I hope that they will do it also for their children which I think they will... and erm ...I think as a young child I was the one who if there was an accident, would stay with the person who had been hurt or clean their knee or... Caring is always something that's quite important to me and I suppose there's been a direction in that in that I've come into a caring profession. I seem to have a ... to naturally fall in to that response for people and I believe that came from the nurturing environment that I had as a child but also possibly coming back to faith. The faith community that I was in, although the care may not have ... you know, it wasn't a perfect community, there was lots of squabbles and arguments, you know, the dissent that comes. But when things were difficult there was, there was that care and support. I had always known respect for faith which is probably what kept me in the direction of remaining with a faith through my life and I have, I suppose a jealousy of people who seem to have a more secure faith than I have and that came through the example of the religious people that I've met through my life. I had a very strong influence when I was a young girl of a priest who befriended the family and was missing his own family. He came from a large family but was in [city] and I suppose recognised a similarity in our family and he just showed us kindness but also a great sense of fun. He did eventually move on and became a bishop and now is in the Vatican so he was an exceptional man, a very intelligent man. I then in the convent I met nuns who ...you hear all these stories from people who have been in convents about these crazy women but the nuns I was with were not. They were strong and intelligent women and I think that was an influence. So has there been a direction? I don't know. There are all these influences that I would recognise. If anything, the direction from school was not to go into teaching but to do something more worthy than teaching which confused me because they were teachers themselves.

S: Yes (laughter)

B: That was a bit strange but I did know at a very early age that I wanted to teach.

S: Thanks for that.

- B: I don't know if I've answered your question, Stephen...
- S: No, no. That's OK. You understand what lay behind the question ...if you were aware of something that's linked these apparently disparate things together ... it was just a speculative...
- B: I'm not sure that I've reflected on that well enough to...
- S: As well as the influence then, of what I've called religious faith in practice, the second strand of that was how ...erm ...that faith may have shaped what I've called here 'inner space and personal reflection'. And certainly in the time that we reflected on your very deep personal loss, that led to questioning and what you called a critical outlook on your own faith and a sense of relief that came through our conversation that you realised that, you used the words, that it was 'OK' to be critical like this. When we talked a little bit about your own time for reflection and stillness as well, you talked about what I've called here an ecclesiastical setting that somehow you found that in places of worship. I just wondered, would that setting for reflection and stillness physically, would that include prayer as part of that?
- B: Yes. I am quite a prayerful person. Sometimes without consciously preparing to pray my natural reaction to being confused, to being challenged and to being afraid is to pray (pause) I'm not sure how effective my prayer is but it's almost a knee jerk reaction, an unconscious response is prayer.
- S: We'd gone on to talk about the very deep emotional strain that you described in our last meeting, what I've called dysfunctional families and something somehow kept you going. I had a strong sense of moral obligation. As far as the children were concerned ...
- B: Yes...
- S: this was morally, very much the right thing to do. You said at one stage I thought should I be doing this? I really can't be doing this, going beyond really what the boundaries are. What did you turn to at that particular time?
- B: I know that, and some people might not consider this for prayer but for me it is. One of my thoughts was God give me strength, give me patience (pause) but also it does make you reflect on - I had to really think - what is my purpose here, as head of this school? But also as a person and can there be a cut off point? I've got to give them time. What I mustn't do is give advice that I'm not qualified to give. Direct them to that advice but also not take on the responsibility for them and be with them while they make the phone call but don't make the phone call for them. It was that kind of response. But I was also aware that after the time they had with me, the emotional response and the outpouring and the information that they shared with me, I have this consciousness and it comes from the experience of working that they would go away and the following day they might regret having shared that with me and wish they hadn't. I think sometimes we've got to allow that space which is why I think it's important (pause) to know when to step back and to try not to judge, to listen and offer the help and support that you can. But I think we try not to judge but there is a point at which we have to say if something isn't acceptable and it's not to do with a particular set of moral values but some things are simply not acceptable and to have the courage maybe to say that is challenging. The strength to do that does come from values that I have but also a knowledge that I don't think they're the only values that are worthy or worthwhile. I am, I do try to be respectful of values that are different from mine.
- S: Yes, you said that as well.

- B: Yes, trying strongly to get that value.
- S: Yes, you talked ...I'll come to what I called self-knowledge later on but, yes, that was a real sense from your equal opportunities background, particularly you mentioned of being aware that a personal perspective is a personal prospective and we ought to be aware of a polyphony of voices or perspectives here.
- B: But I think that we can be sometimes so aware and conscious of that, that we put aside some basic values and maybe allow things to go on that we ought to be stopping...
- S: Yes, yes.
- B: It's that, that I sometimes find difficult but working with those parents, we can't work with the children without working with the parents. We don't always have the skills to do it but we're often the first line, the first people that they meet because they come to school on a daily basis.
- S: I didn't have the sense that you were arguing for relativism, I didn't have that all; rather for a sensitive understanding that there may be a range of perspectives that we ought to take on board.
- B: And I think with the parents, what I have to, what I share with them is that I hear what they're saying and I understand what they're saying but I can't always agree with them.
- S: So I've moved through religious faith shaping, if you like, purpose and meaning. Religious faith then and personal reflection and under religious faith as well I then talked about or tried to use the heading 'balancing influences on life, direction in life'. I don't know whether those headings will stand up but those were the way my mind was going and that's when I was drawn very closely obviously to the Christian care, the ethic of social justice which again has permeated our conversations right from the beginning. Thank you for letting me see the assembly, there was one more question I wanted to share with you about that if I could. Was there something particularly going on in your mind during that assembly? It was the assembly with the mouse who wanted to be what he....(laughter)
- B: We have children in school who have low self-esteem and what we try to share with them that who they are is unique and that we respect who they are. They don't have to be like the person who does the best reading or the person who's got the prettiest face, you know, all the things that young children see are very obvious to them and if you want any of those things, what's your worth? Actually, you've got worth for who you are and Morton the Mouse is somebody who comes up quite often in the school and gets himself into all sorts of difficulties and the children quite like him. So we use Morton the Mouse for that quite often but it's really about respect for the individual and we bring the children lots and lots of examples of that and ways and then we're able to talk with them about that. But the collective worship in school does have a greater impact on the children than I first understood. We had a - last term - we had a family that had adopted three children who had had a pretty rough childhood and had adopted them when they were, I think they were five, eight and ten so we had the younger child in the school and two years after the adoption, the adoptive mother got cancer and died and you kind of think, 'How can all this happen to this one small group of children?' So we had to look at how we would support that child within our community and we talked to the children about the mother's death and how the other children might be feeling. We talked to them about their feelings as some of them got a bit little fearful because mums don't die. The teachers handled that very

well but a week after the child was back in school, one of the children in her class came to me and said [name] wasn't feeling very well that day and I said, 'Have you been able to help her?' and she said, 'Yes, I told her that God is holding her mummy and that he's holding her hand as well'. This was a child that doesn't come from a family that attends church and has very little support at home herself. So I said, 'Do you know that?' And she said, 'Yes, because in our blessing we ask that God's hand is on'...what is it? May God bless our teachers, our helpers, may he show their goodness in all that they do, and we ask for the children that God's hand is on them. And this idea of God holding mum and having the hand on the child, I thought that this young child who does not come from a faith family had that sense and a strong feeling that God was looking after this little girl and her mum was with him in heaven being held by him. I thought that was just so lovely, an example of the impact that worship has on young children. We ask them about it in assembly, after the assembly and ask them what it was about and they say it was about God, it was about Jesus, whether it was or it wasn't because that's the answer that they think we want but I thought this little child really showed that the assembly does that and if Morton the Mouse in any way persuades the child that, you know, I'm good and I'm worthy because of who I am, that's lovely.

S: Thank you for sharing that. Coming from the Christian care social justice theme, I just wondered if you'd found in the demanding role that you have as head, raising standards, the performativity agenda and so on, or even dealing with staff in that sort of context, conflict perhaps between that and the Christian/Gospel values which are underpinning so much of your outlook. Have you?

B: If I just look at it on the surface, there can appear to be a conflict. To have a narrow perspective of development and to create a pressure to succeed, I don't think we do that in this school. I think that we perceive the agenda we have to raise standards as an agenda to give those children. Its social justice again, it is to give those children autonomy, it is to give them the skills to make choices and the skills to operate independently: life skills. I actually embraced that agenda to raise standards and I think as a staff we have a collective understanding of that. There is sometimes from our nursery staff or working with very young children this feeling that education in England has lost its way, that we've lost sight of children within that agenda for improvement. But I don't think we have in this school. I think that agenda is still strongly there because we do have in our prospectus, right at the beginning the Plowden quote that at the heart of the curriculum lies the child and we've not lost that. The difference is if the child lies at the heart of the curriculum and we don't know in twenty years what life is going to be like for that child, we have to give that child the skills, the flexibility and all those other skills that underpin learning but in doing that we ought to be able to raise standards. So there's kind of a surface conflict but if you dig underneath it, there isn't. How we meet that agenda, I think is important.

S: The means are as important as the end?

B: Yes ... that we have to within what we're doing always see the child, the individual child. That's not saying to have an individualised curriculum because that's almost impossible to manage. We don't, but I don't think that we've ever lost sight of the child and even in our policies we state that no policy is more important than an individual child. And policies are there as a framework to work with. If it's not working for the child then we will make adjustments. So I don't think we've lost sight of the child.

S: In the course of our conversations, I used the heading here 'self-knowledge' because we reflected from time to time on your personal loss and we talked

about how that had influenced yourself and your headship, particularly relationships with other people. You talked - and we've mentioned earlier today - about your own internal confidence and you talked about that in terms of public speaking and so on and so forth. 'I'm naturally quite shy', you said at one point.

- B: I am, in fact I very nearly didn't come into to teaching because of my shyness. In my first teaching practice when I had to ring the bell at play time and everybody's eyes turned on me I found that very difficult. I don't even notice it now, but at the time it was awful.
- S: We've alluded to this already, this morning I wrote here 'questioning personal assumptions', particularly your obvious expertise in early years practice. You were aware that was coming from a particular perspective and were aware there were other perspectives...
- B: ...and a particular range of experiences, although over many years have only been in this country and has been inner city and rural which is different but people talk about my wide experiences as an early years practitioner, well actually it's not that wide is it?
- S: We then moved, it's probably as much of a reflection on myself as well as yourself but I wrote here, retirement or pending retirement (laughter). We talked a little bit about some of the issues relating to college, loss of identity and personal loss of identity that might happen at that time. So we left it with a sort of new coping, if you like, on the horizon. We talked about coping and control a little bit earlier, you said - self knowledge - that you needed to be in control, you needed to cope and I was just wondering how on earth in all this does Bernadette manage to keep calm?
- B: (laughs)
- S: How do you do it?
- B: I don't know that I do, all the time! I think because my needing to be in control and needing to cope is not about controlling others or necessarily controlling situations. It's about self control and also when things are so massive that I can't get to them, the coping is prioritising what I can. It's the grace to know what you can do and then understanding that of the things you can't do and what you're going to do about them and that for me is how I manage. Also, with the children's centre agenda, the new agenda that we're working on with *Every Child Matters* which is multi-agency working. There is no model of this before, there's nothing we can base it on. It's exciting because it's new ground. Management alone won't get you there: it has to be leadership, so your values come back in, your faith is there supporting that as well but that's why, if I felt I needed to, if my control was the need to control every element of it, I would just go under. It's complex and it's messy. It's not straight forward, not at the moment. It may be in the future but I think sometimes the coping is walking gingerly through the mess that's around you and identifying these are the priorities, these are what we do, we can't meet that at the moment that will come in this time. If that becomes difficult then I'll have to delegate some of that to who is there to take that on without over burdening them. That is the coping but it does mean that sometimes I get surprised when I realise something's happened, I then I feel a little bit of discomfort about it because I wasn't aware it was going that way or if something takes a direction that I personally haven't led it in and having to accept that. Thinking I wish they done it that way, but actually this has happened and it's learning to actually accept that. For example I can't observe everything that's happening at our outreach venues, I can't do it. I have to accept the evaluations. I have to accept the discussion we have. Other people are

overseeing it and I have to trust their judgement. It's that kind of control and coping really but it's very much a personal control.

- S: I then moved beyond faith as a basis for understanding to self-knowledge and so on and began to look at what I call the human search for what my framework calls the human search for needing, values and so on and we talked about the [social action] which links to the ethic of care and concern and justice and so on that we talked about. A very deep humanitarian ethic which you said was underpinning your work and a concern...we talked about inner space in the context of faith and prayer but that again was being cashed out in terms of your school and your colleagues in school and your concern for inner space: time for children to stand and stare and reflect and so on but also for colleagues through the learning journals so they had the opportunity to reflect on their personal and professional direction. You talked as well about 'me' times, opportunities to walk in solitude with your own thoughts. I also had a sense of what I've called here deep human capacities for responding to despair and suffering, your own loss. We talked about the impact on headship and you talked about the empathy and the sympathy, concern that you had for people not in the context of loss particularly but in the context of devastating experiences in their own lives. You talked particularly about young mums in the context of the community of your school and the devastation when things went wrong for them and the need to help and support them.
- B: And the very public humiliation in a smaller community...
- S: Absolutely...
- B: There was no anonymity for them. So they have to carry their hurt very publicly. Many of them have never experienced reflection and personal space. When I talk with them ... very few of them ...they've hurtled through life. Very few of them have had the opportunity to stop and think or to put their life into context. It just happens to them, day on day.
- S: The next section that I used then was to talk about not so much human capacities but human capabilities; a deep, deep sense of integrity running through our conversations. The example that I drew upon was very much in your early career. Sex education, you believe in sex education in a particular and in a particular context that brings you into trouble with officialdom or conflict with officialdom. In fact real officialdom kind of approves of what you're doing!
- B: I didn't know that at the time though! (laughs)
- S: Petty officialdom doesn't, but real officialdom does! Then we talked about joy and you outlined in some detail joy through the work of the children in the school and their achievements. We talked about this wonderful moment where you brought in your lovely box of 72 coloured pencils and everybody was drawing faces and that was great. You talked yourself about the opportunities to get lost in the creativity of your own painting. What sort of work do you do by the way? Are you a landscape person or an anything person? Are you a Picasso, a Matisse or a Cezanne?
- B: I'm a hotchpotch. I have painted landscape but I'm not a painter of pretty pictures. I've also painted portraits and I've painted (pause) I suppose feelings and emotions. So I'm not an abstract painter. I do some realism as well but I have painted abstract as well. So it's a mix. I've also worked with oils and water colours. Oils I love because you can really push them around the page. I love that. My work is (pause) ...I suppose there are some impressionistic tendencies in my work where I'm not too fussed by the

details. My drawings are not, my drawing is very detailed and I was trained to draw. I'm not one of these artists that ...I was lucky that I came through when drawing was taught and I had a natural ability for drawing anyway, it was my route in I suppose. So they're very detailed but my paintings are less so. I'm not that interested, it's more the atmosphere and the feeling of the painting matters to me so I do a range of things but my painting's not pretty. I had, I don't know if I told you I had a friend who looked over my shoulder once when I was doing some plant drawing, I love drawing plants for the textures and colours, I think they're just wonderful. She said, 'You're the only person I know who can draw a daffodil that looks as though it will come off the page and strangle you', and I thought goodness! So even my flower painting's not pretty!

S: Daffodils like trifids! (S and B laugh)... That was joy through children and joy through their achievements and personal joy through art and in the work that you're doing. When we talked a little bit about these dysfunctional families, you said you, at the end of the process, could feel very little empathy with the people concerned and I just wondered where – I don't know - forgiveness lay in this. Did you find it difficult to forgive them?

B: I don't know that I see it as my place to forgive or not. I bear no grudges in the sense of anger with them. I suppose I had a sense of frustration (long pause). It comes back to something that somebody said to me once and I don't know whether I've shared it with you. Once the director of education was talking to me and said, 'Bernadette, what's the most difficult thing for you in headship?' I said, 'It's actually having to be magnanimous to somebody that you want to poke in the eye'. I sometimes want to give them a shake or a smack. Not that I ever would but I'm using that as an example, but I have this frustration and want to give them a shake and say, 'You're better than this, see it in yourself. You have the capacity to change things and make things better for yourself and your children'. And actually they don't have the capacity to make that choice and I find that extremely difficult and it's not that I don't forgive them: I just find it hard to endure that and I have to be honest about that, I find it extremely difficult. I understand their lack of capacity. I'm thinking about one mother in particular who's had parenting courses, individual support, one-on-one support. She has not changed her behaviours for her child at all. She is unable to change those behaviours but we leave that child in that situation and at risk. I have a sympathy for her: empathy, I'm not sure that I do. I don't think I've ever seen it as my place to forgive. I hope that the child in the future will have the capacity to forgive but it's very, very difficult and I find it very, very hard to acknowledge that with all the services involved with that family, that child, two years on, is still at risk and we haven't intervened with that and that I find extremely difficult. I do sometimes, when we talk about God and His care ...I sometimes look and think, 'God where's your care? Where's your intervention?' We've got all these people who are seeing this and we're not intervening and I find that very difficult. Just as I find that a God who would allow the Passover to happen and to kill the first born but I have to accept that I'm not going to understand everything. So that's something that I have to live with I think.

S: The final parts of the work that I did on human capacities... I have here for idealism, commitment ...strong sustaining relationships have been a very powerful thread.

B: I think I feel that I've been blessed in my family and friends because I know lots of people who have not been as lucky and the friends I had when I was five and six years old are still my friends. Their children are my children's friends and it's like a family bond. What I had in common was the closest group of those friends was we shared a faith and I'm not sure that we were aware of that and then friends that have joined that friendship group later as

we were teens and became more independent and moved outside our faith community were all people who worked in the arts or social care and who had strong social conscience, although they didn't share our faith. So there was a connection in that the danger with that kind of group of friends is you confirm your own beliefs; you don't have to challenge things.

- S: Following the same theme, we've already talked about dealing with this parental familial conflict and the sense, you used the words 'you can't leave this'. That's why I included that under this notion of commitment, there was something there, a deep moral obligation to these children that you weren't going to...
- B: ...and not accepting that two years on that child, he's still in that risk situation and I find that absolutely frustrating. We haven't left it at that. We're constantly calling in things. It's almost a tenacity to personally have the knock backs every time nothing happens for him or people put their hands up and say, 'Unless the mother works with us, there's nothing we can do'. And it's getting close to the point ...is that the right setting for the child to remain... which is an awful thing to have to think about. You don't leave it. You can't walk away from that.
- S: The last heading in the framework that I worked to is this, what I call 'response to the natural and man made world'. We've already referred on a couple occasions to your upbringing and rural [location] and again through our conversations you talked about this joy that you had in going back to your childhood home, you talked about walking through your knees in mud and the great freedom...
- B: and not wearing shoes...
- S: There was also this, in our last conversation, this great 'Wow!' of what I wrote here the power of children's learning as well as this sensitivity and joy and all those things connected with the natural world. There was a sense of 'Wow!' this amazing ...but also the capacity of young children which came through.
- B: Which reminds you why you're in the job and if the office ever gets too heavy, the best thing to do is go into the nursery or into one of the reception classes and get alongside a group of children and suddenly remember why you're doing it, if you ever need a reminder.
- S: All those then were very powerful influences, but I thought I would make a note of the negative, which I simply call bureaucratic interference as a kind of collective term for all the things we've talked about. So what I've tried to do is to go through our conversations and pull out the main theme as relating to the project that I've been sharing with you. What I'm trying to do is understand those deep sources that motivate, sustain and inspire headteachers at the very deepest level; the person inside the professional role. I'm asking for your professional help really. Have I got it right? Are there some parts of you in terms of our conversations, this kind of deep inner Bernadette, that somehow I've missed? As I've shared those things with you have you thought, he's kind of... or is there something missing you want to add?
- B: No, I think it's there. I have in my career been privileged to meet some exceptional people and they have been an inspiration and I suppose they've enabled me to put my own responses into some kind of contexts. I think there have only been three which is dreadful in a career as long as mine. One was a headteacher that I worked with who... I didn't fully share her philosophy but she taught me how to be warm, how to make myself more approachable, how to enable particularly vulnerable women bringing up children to trust that

I would respond to them without judgement and I don't know that I had that before I met her. It was working alongside her, watching her natural nurturing of everybody around her; staff, her own family, children and then the parents. I think working with her rounded my shoulders a little bit, took the edges off me. I met her when I came to [region] , I'd come from an area of [city] where there was a fair bit of conflict between community and any authority and you have to have some kind of shield to take that onslaught and she taught me to take that away and meet people in a non-judgemental way. So although I had felt that I had that openness before, meeting her made me realise that actually I had created a professional barrier and she taught me to bring that barrier down. Then I met another headteacher who through his just... his sheer joy of life and personality taught me that it didn't matter if I forgot where a meeting was or what the time of it was and that it was alright to phone up and ask and that we all make the mistakes. We bumble sometimes and actually that's very human; to err is human and rather than to feel that, 'Oh gosh, I've done that wrong again. I hope nobody notices', put your hand up and say, 'Hey guys, I've made a real clanger there'. He taught me to get egg on my face and not be too embarrassed by it and I think that was just by the power of his personality and his joy in life and the way he just bounced back from all these things. He made loads of mistakes but he'd lived with them. He was comfortable with himself and he would make sure that he didn't make them again. Highly professional; and he taught me that. The third person that I met who was an absolutely influential person in my life is probably my best friend. She works with severely disabled people and I've known her since we were children and she is a devout Christian and she has taught me what true Christianity is in the way that she supports and gives. It's just come naturally to her; it's how she behaves towards and with other people. She's been a tremendous influence as well and I envy her faith, her absolute faith that there is a God that is good and who will care for her, who will guide her and lead her. She looks for signs and one time she had to make a really difficult decision soon after her father had died and she was very close to her father and she had to make a difficult decision and she said, 'God just give me a sign to let me know I'm making the right decision', and I was in the house with her when she said it and a clock that hadn't worked for may years just chimed and she said, 'There you are Bernadette'. She was so sure that was the sign. She had the sign: that was enough for her. To actually confirm this difficult decision she was making and if that was a sign then nothing like that has ever happened to me. The clock hadn't worked for years and it just chimed at that moment. We laughed about it afterwards; she was saying, 'There you are: that's a sign.' They're not chance meetings. I suppose they are chance in a sense that maybe you're going to talk about looking for a direction for a flow, maybe you have to open to those influences along the way in order to recognise them and allow them to have that influence. Those influences have been powerful influences to make me a better person, I think for good, in my life.

- S: Would you want to re-label these characteristics particularly, or group them?
- B: I'm quite impressed by them actually.
- S: Do you see any sort of connections or links?
- B: I think for me it confirms what I talked to you about in between striving to be a decent and good human being and trying to find a direction to God. The connection here is really strong.
- S: Some people would want to call these attributes and characteristics spiritual. Now if I was to write this up as the spiritual dimension of your headship, how would you feel? Do you feel I've got it right? If you want to say, 'No, it's all wrong. There is no spiritual dimension. Tear it up, throw it away and start

again Stephen. These are just personal skills', please say so because it's your challenge now that I would welcome.

B: I think they're skills that have grown over time partly from experience but also from something else and that something else could be called a spiritual dimension. I suppose it is a spiritual dimension of my life and my work. I do believe life does have a spiritual dimension.

S: What would you understand by the spiritual dimension of headship?

B: (pause) I suppose it's the ... It's quite difficult. I think the spiritual dimension is the inspiration that comes to us as headteachers. It's what sustains us through our headship andI suppose it sort of falls on a personal vision because that is far broader than any experience we require or any action we take. There's that something else that comes that's hard to define really but I think it is around; it's like a higher meaning of something. Something that goes beyond the practical. I don't know that I can define it any more fully than that.

S: If we just alter the question slightly. We talked about this spiritual dimension or possible spiritual dimension on what that may mean in the context of headship but what would you understand by spirituality...by the term itself?

B: One of the reasons I've got somebody coming to work with us in February is because I have had great difficulty in defining that and I'm not sure I fully know. I think I have felt it but I'm not sure that I have the words to define it. I mean spirituality, for me it's the capacity, I suppose, to experience and feel (pause) things like wonder and things like inspiration and the ability to take your thinking beyond your day-to-day experiences. I can't quite define it. I've always found it extremely....which is why we haven't written a policy. I find it extremely difficult. I think you see it in other people and you see it happening and you experience it but to define it, I don't know that I can.

S: It's root of course is in spiritus – the wind. Catch the wind.

B: It is difficult.

S: Absolutely, absolutely.

We've talked a great deal about the school forming, or your forming the school. Has the school formed you? Changed you?

B: Yes it has.

S: Very particularly, you've brought a particular part of this spiritual dimension to the school but what has the school and the children and your colleagues brought to you? Has that restricted or helped your own particular spirituality?

B: Well with not being able to define it (laughs). I think having the privilege to work to develop a school and been given almost a free hand to do it is unusual and it was a fairly awesome responsibility but what it did for me was enabled me to really think deeply about what it was we wanted to achieve. Not just for the children, but for the community and for the teaching staff... I don't know whether this is spiritual but it has given me an intense satisfaction but not complacency that in my long career I've been able to achieve something that's making a difference to people's lives and that is not a complacent satisfaction and it's not a smug satisfaction, it's just a feeling that yes, together here as a school community we're making a difference.

- S: As you look back has there been a time where you can say, 'Oh yes, that was a particular spiritual moment'?
- B: Well there are the very personal ones...the birth of your children ...the real absolute wonders. When suddenly there's this independent small creature that's there is absolutely wonderful and the perfection of humans really in their innocence. Then waking up one morning, stepping out onto a balcony and watching the sun rise is absolutely wonderful. When that happens you think what a wonderful world we live in, isn't it beautiful? I also get those feelings in the celebratory feeling when you go into an absolutely incredible exhibition of art work and you think this wonderful creativity. That for me is spiritual and of course the moments when children bring things to you because I work with children. Those very, very special wonderful moments when you can share something or a child shares something with you that is quite personal and insightful. You recognise the spirituality in a small child.
- S: Shall we stop there, unless there's anything more that you feel that you want to say about what I've tried to put together.
- B: It certainly reflects what we've talked about. It's interesting what you've picked up and further reflected on.

Interview ends

Appendix 4

Aide memoire: Bernadette Interview 3 (Appendix 3)

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Issues for discussion

Religious faith and practice

Christ as example for living; a model, a perfect model of the way in which human life should be conducted.

Meaning and purpose – to lead the best 'human life' that is possible

Professionally – at support each member of the school's community in reaching his/her potential.

Deep personal reflection on loss leading to questioning/critical outlook on personal faith.

Ecclesiastical setting for reflection/stillness.

Christian care/social justice

Aspiration for school's community

Self-knowledge

Reflection on loss – coming to terms with influence on self/headship

Internal confidence grown

Questioning personal assumptions

Need to be in control, to cope

Reflection on pending retirement; new coping and self knowledge

Values, commitment

Social action (shaped by faith)

Stillness, inner space

Concern for 'inner space' for children and for colleagues

'me times' – walking in solitude

Despair, suffering

Deep sympathy (parents, carers, school's community)

Love, peace, creativity, forgiveness, integrity, hope, wonder, joy, idealism

Integrity – belief in teaching approaches – sex education

Joy through children in school and their achievements. Personal joy?

Sharing coloured pencils – drawing faces

Getting lost in painting

Forgiveness – dysfunctional family factions

Idealism, commitment

Strong, sustaining relationships – family, friends (over many years)

Dealing with family/parental conflict – ‘You can’t leave this’

Responses to natural or man made world

Growing up in rural location

Enjoying nature - ‘back to my childhood’ – ‘up to your knees in mud’

The power of children’s learning.

Negative influences (demotivating)

Bureaucratic interference

Adapted from: Halstead, J.M. & Taylor, M.J. (2000); Alexander, H. & McLaughlin, T. (2003).